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Volume XVI

Edited by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and
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PHOTOGRAPHY AGAINST THE GRAIN

Essays and Photo Works 1973 – 1983

Allan Sekula

THE PRESS OF THE NOVA SCOTIA COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

TR
654
.S44
1984

For Sally

Contents

Published by
The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design
5163 Duke Street
Halifax, Nova Scotia
Canada B3J 3J6 Tel. (902) 422-7381

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Published in 1984
Design: Benjamin Buchloh, Allan Sekula, Sally A. Stein, and Robert Wilkie
Design of cover graphic: Allan Sekula and Sally A. Stein
Production: Diane Hiscox and Robert Wilkie
Pressman: Guy Harrison
Printed and bound in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

The publication of this book coincides with an exhibition at the Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art, entitled *Photography against the Grain: Photo Works 1973-1984*, November 16-December 7, 1984. The exhibition and this publication were funded in part by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Sekula, Allan
Photography against the grain

(The Nova Scotia series ; 16)
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-919616-28-3

1. Sekula, Allan. 2. Photography, Artistic.
3. Photography — History and criticism — Addresses, essays, lectures. 4. Art, Modern — 20th century — Addresses, essays, lectures. I. Title. II. Series:
The Nova Scotia series : source materials of the contemporary arts ; 16.

TR654.S44 1984 770'.92'4 C84-099209-2

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85, fig. 4	Kreil	Kriel
227, line 10	part	party
252, line 12	German	Germanic
253, line 33	was was	war was

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Acknowledgments

It is difficult to acknowledge more than a decade's worth of help from many sources.

For guidance, critical discussion, and dialogue of various sorts I am grateful especially to David Antin, Karl Beveridge, Carole Condé, Brian Connell, Hans Haacke, Max Kozloff, Fred Lonidier, Annette Michelson, Martha Rosler, Philip Steinmetz, and Alan Trachtenberg.

I thank my parents, Ignace Sekula and Evelyn Sekula, for their contribution to and thoughtful comments on the works in this book, and for their understanding. My siblings, Stefan Sekula, Brian Sekula, Victoria Sekula, and Michelle Sekula are also to be thanked for their comments.

For *This Ain't China*, I owe a debt to co-workers, collaborators, and performers: Gregg Arreguin, Steven Buck, Lennart Bourin, Helen Dresman, Ruth Krimmel, and David Scholar. *School Is a Factory* was constructed with the help of Angie Agrate, Carol Burke-Fonté, Fred Dolan, Campbell Skillman, Lee Whitten, and all the people who consented to being photographed. And *Sketch for a Geography Lesson* would not have been possible without the kind help of Timm Rautert and Ute Eskildsen.

Ute Eskildsen is also to be thanked for her decision to exhibit the photo works in this volume at the Folkwang Museum in Essen, West Germany, early in 1984. Likewise, Jonathan Green's support for a similar exhibition at the Ohio State University Gallery of Fine Art is much appreciated.

I am grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts and to the Ohio Arts Council for fellowship support for art making and art criticism. The Ohio Arts Council also provided welcome project grant support for this publication.

I am grateful also to these former colleagues at Ohio State University for their solidarity in the face of the “higher learning in America”: Thom Andersen, Noël Burch, Carl Clausen, James Friedman, and J. Ronald Green. Dialogue with graduate students, especially with Blake Fitzpatrick and Vincent Leo, was also important.

A number of people at Ohio State are to be thanked for their help in preparing material for this book: Blake Fitzpatrick, Vincent Leo, Katherine Miller, Clara Murray, Susan Spero, and Helen Wada for their work on photographic sources and reproductions, and Marilyn Clapham for transcribing interviews. Sarah Greenough also helped in obtaining photo reproductions and permissions.

The color of the cover was inspired by a design by Perry Nesbitt which used one of the graphics from *School Is a Factory*.

Working with the Press of NSCAD has been a materialist lesson in publishing. I am grateful to Garry N. Kennedy, the college president, for his support, to Meredith Bell and Diane Hiscox for their work on the physical production of this book, and to Maureen States for last-minute typing. Guy Harrison deserves special thanks for his skill as a printer.

My editors, Benjamin Buchloh and Robert Wilkie, cannot be thanked enough for their unwavering support on this project, our second collaboration. Their wise editorial suggestions, especially in matters of design, did much to improve the book. I value the critical dialogue with both of them. Robert Wilkie is to be especially thanked for his dedication, patience, hard work, and trips to Ohio during the long process of putting this book together.

Sally Stein was, in effect, a third editor of this book. I am deeply grateful to her for her sense of photography, of history-writing, of montage, and for her everyday and extraordinary support of this endeavor.



Introduction

I

This is a book *about* photography. This is also a book *of* photographs, a book that speaks within and alongside and through photographs. Here is one way in which this book brushes photography against the grain: normally separated tasks — of writer and photographer, of “critic” and “visual artist” — are here allowed to coexist, perhaps uneasily, between the covers of a single volume. In planning this book, I had questions — for the most part still unanswered — about the ways these distinct modes of address might overlap, reinforce each other, or subvert whatever privilege each might claim if it operated alone. It would be, for example, a mistake to assume that the works in the second half of this book were intended as “practical solutions” to “theoretical problems” discussed in the essays which begin the book.

What unites these tasks, what lends this book its “unitary” character as a text, is a concern with photography as a *social practice*. Thirteen years ago, when I first began making photographs with any seriousness, the medium’s paramount attraction was, for me, its unavoidable social referentiality, its way of describing — albeit in enigmatic, misleading, reductive and often superficial terms — a world of social institutions, gestures, manners, relationships. And the problematic character of this descriptive power is itself compelling, compounded by the fact that the life world that beckons is one in which the photographer is already a social actor, never a completely innocent or objective bystander.

At that time photography seemed to me to afford an alternative to the overly specialized, esoteric, and self-referential discourse of late modernism, which had, to offer only one crude example, nothing much to say about the Vietnam War.

So, somewhat naively perhaps, I began to try combining words

and groupings of photographs in ways that sought to incorporate and to invite a political dialogue. Such dialogue seemed possible in theatre and cinema, especially in the work of Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Luc Godard, and Peter Weiss, but more difficult to imagine for the nonliterary visual arts, which are dialogical only in the very important sense that one work might “answer” or respond to another. One attraction and challenge of photography was its dumb resistance to language, its way of suppressing in a static moment its often dialogical social origins. I was initially drawn as a spectator to that genre of photography which was most clearly the outcome of an intersubjective play or conflict of intentions and representations: the portrait. Looking at the works of August Sander and Diane Arbus, for example, I saw mute enigmatic evidence of hidden theatrical enterprise, the wordless outcomes of wordy encounters. I developed a parallel interest in verbal interviews and began to use a tape recorder as well as a camera. David Antin’s approach to a nonliterary poetics of talk was quite influential — both practically and theoretically — at this point. Somewhat later I began to read and listen to Studs Terkel’s remarkable oral histories, which seemed to pose a challenge from below to the authority of professional historiography and literary culture.¹

On a more practical, material level photography and audiotape recording were cheaper and less demanding technically than either theatrical or documentary filmmaking — both beyond my grasp — and open to being used in ways that kept close to the visible events and patterns of everyday life and the flow of mundane talk, argument, reminiscence, and self-justification. Furthermore, I wanted to construct works from *within* concrete life situations, situations within which there was either an overt or active clash of interests and representations. Any interest I had in artifice and constructed dialogue was part of a search for a certain “realism,” a realism not of appearances or social facts but of everyday experience in and against the grip of advanced capitalism. This realism sought to brush traditional realism against the grain. Against the photoessayistic promise of “life” caught by the camera, I sought to work from within a world already replete with signs.

Aerospace Folktales was a first attempt at an extended “documentary.” As an undergraduate at a science-oriented university in 1968, I had discovered lots of reasons to view corporate science with suspicion. Working as a chemical technician for a couple of probably only moderately corrupt aerospace subcontracting companies and pouring hydrofluoric acid to the sound of Muzak did little to improve my opinion. And nothing in my experience inclined me to accept Reyner Banham’s vision of Los Angeles as a post-urban utopia.² My work on *Aerospace Folktales* was also affected by feminist and Marxist critiques of the New Left. These critiques emerged as that movement broke into sectarian fragments at the end of the 1960s. The “old” New Left that had sustained a continuity of struggle from the civil rights movement

1. See David Antin, *Talking*, New York, 1972, and *Talking at the Boundaries*, New York, 1976. See also Studs Terkel, *Division Street: America*, New York, 1966, and *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression in America*, New York, 1970.

2. Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Harmondsworth, 1971.

through to the mass opposition to the Vietnam War was now charged with having ignored issues of gender and personal life on the one hand, and issues of class and labor on the other. I felt that the only way to “account” for my politics — the only way to invite a political dialogue — was to “begin” with my own class and family background. *Aerospace Folktales* was structured around a movement between mock-sociological distance and familiarity. Certainly it is impossible to escape or ignore the fact that this is a work by a young man about the conditions of his own upbringing and those of his siblings. And to some extent the class anger discovered in the work — the sense of one’s parents’ lives being caught within what Ernest Mandel has termed the “permanent arms economy” of late capitalism — mixes with filial anger and desire. In its own adolescent way, the commentary both exposes and denies this confusion. So in the interests of whatever value that commentary might have as a “document” of the relationship between the personal and the political, I have decided to let the words stand, “and insofar as they were an image of my foolishness, to let them accuse me,” to recall James Agee, who cultivated a Roman Catholic sense of confession. *On the other hand*, adolescent rebellion has its truth. This needs saying when neoconservative psychologizers would have us remember the late 1960s and early 1970s as no more than an unpleasant and not-to-be-repeated episode during which the collective juvenile unconscious ran wild in the streets.

Although my work is more “reflexive” than traditional social documentary, it seeks to avoid what Perry Anderson has termed “the megalomania of the signifier.” Unlike most modernists (and most photographers are still committed to modernism, bewildered by the irony lurking in their invitation into the cafeteria of post-modernism) I am not particularly interested in cultivating an “individual style.” And unlike many postmodernists, I am not concerned with an art based on the fatalistic play of quotations and “appropriations” of already existing images, especially when that play emerges from an idealist isolation of the “image-world” from its material conditions.

The emphasis in these photo works has consistently been on the *ensemble*, and not on the formal or semantic success or failure of the single image. This seemed the only reasonable way to shift photography away from its affiliations with painting and printmaking and toward an investigation of its shared and unshared ground with literature and cinema. Furthermore, this seemed the only reasonable way to counter the tendency to incorporate photography into the museum, the tendency to produce work designed for judgment and acceptance by that institution.

I have decided not to say much about any “system” of montage behind the making of these photo works. Their construction is experimental and contingent. The function of text is not to introduce certainty. My hope is that the present context will allow these works to be read as “chapters” in a larger discontinuous work.

One last confession. I have consistently found it difficult to resist the attraction of a certain gestural repertoire consisting of "vulgar" or "popular" responses to the representational challenge posed by the camera: mugging, hyperbolic displays of objects, plays on the two-dimensional rendering of space. All of these derive from a popular understanding of the artifice of photography. Why should one assume that this understanding is solely the intellectual property of specialists?

II

My interest in the history and theory of photography emerged from and closely paralleled problems encountered in practice. Having begun to photograph as a way out of a late modernist cul-de-sac, I also realized that photography was in the process of being assigned a new position within the late modernist system of the arts. This was enough to spark both caution and historical curiosity.

Perhaps it is significant that I began, innocently enough, by looking at published photographs, and not at museologically preserved specimens. Thus I was more quickly impressed than might otherwise have been the case by the extreme degree to which photographic meaning was dependent on context. Here was a visual art for which, unlike cinema, discontinuity and incompleteness seemed fundamental, despite attempts to construct reassuring notions of organic unity and coherence at the level of the single image. Thus the problem of reception, the problem of what Walter Benjamin termed the "afterlife" of the work of art, becomes especially important for photography. And thus also the category of the author is especially fragile and subject to editorial revision.

When one encounters the photographs of Lewis Hine in the *Survey*, and those of Alfred Stieglitz in *Camera Work*, it becomes difficult to sustain the belief that their differences are primarily stylistic, for those two historically coincident journals constituted such radically different discursive contexts: one devoted to a developing politics and professionalism of social welfare and the other to a vehemently anti-utilitarian avant-garde. Could the photographs of Hine and Stieglitz be understood independently of their mode and context of address? And could either photographer be considered an "artist" independently of his affiliation with these discourses? These were the questions that I set out to answer in "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning." Beyond this, my primary aim was to sketch out the limits of a discursive field using their works and reputations as exemplars, to examine the way in which the twentieth century discourse of photography oscillates between the need for "Hine" — the model of liberal-utilitarian realism, and a need for "Stieglitz" — the model of autonomous esthetic endeavour. (However, it should be added now that the official need for "Hine" has diminished drastically with the collapse of a liberal ideological consensus in the United States since the end of the 1960s, and thus the social documentary tradition Hine had a

hand in inventing becomes problematic in a new sense. This was the issue I attempted to address from an activist position in "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary.")

My early critical interests, then, were antagonistic to the formalist closure inherent in the American modernist project, a closure that would regard Hine and Stieglitz as authorial embodiments of stylistically opposed tendencies in photographic history. And, on a more theoretical level, while I was clearly indebted to structuralism, and particularly to Roland Barthes's early essays on photography, the isolation of an abstract language system from social language, from language use, seemed to have produced a related kind of closure, more "scientific" perhaps than that effected by modernist criticism, but closure nonetheless. Walter Benjamin's emphasis on the historical specificity of the "age of mechanical reproducibility" was an important counter to the tendency to think of photography in overly synchronic or ahistorical terms. It was impossible to think about photography without recognizing the importance of historical shifts in the meaning, function and cultural status of photographic representation. Furthermore, in 1975 I discovered the very early Marxist critique of the "abstract objectivism" of formalist linguistics in one of the works of the "Bakhtin circle" of Soviet literary scholars and semiologists: V. N. Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929). The aim of M. M. Bakhtin and his associates was to establish a sociology of literature based on a recognition of the "heteroglossia" of "living language," on a recognition of discourse as an arena of ideological and social difference and conflict. Voloshinov sought to supersede not only the abstract objectivism of Saussurean linguistics, but also the "individualistic subjectivism" of linguistic theories — derived from Wilhelm von Humboldt — which stressed the individual creativity inherent in the speech act. As Raymond Williams has remarked, "Voloshinov's decisive contribution was to find a way beyond the powerful but partial theories of expression and objective system." This "way beyond" necessarily acknowledged the socially-created character of language.³

If we look at contemporary cultural studies in the United States, we discover a curious echo of the reverberations between Voloshinov's "two trends in the philosophy of language." On the one hand, structuralist and post-structuralist models assert the autonomous determining force of language, its priority over human subjects. On the other hand, a more conservative and institutionally entrenched "humanist" paradigm claims to defend the autonomy of the creative subject. For those of us who are involved in photography, the polarities of this debate are quite evident, both in theory and in practice.

However, this is merely the latest stage in the prolonged crisis of subjectivity at the heart of bourgeois culture. Photography, in its mechanical character, in its instrumental affiliation with bureaucratic rationalism, in its acceleration and quantitative extension of

3. See V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik, New York and London, 1973. See also P. N. Medvedev/M. M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (1928), trans. Albert J. Wehrle, Baltimore and London, 1978; and M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, Austin, 1981. Raymond Williams's reading of Voloshinov's importance for Marxist literary theory is found in *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 21-44. (An unresolved controversy brews about the extent to which Voloshinov and Medvedev were "authors," or junior partners in a dialogue with Bakhtin, or scribes or even pen names for Bakhtin. The matter is complicated by the fact that neither Voloshinov nor Medvedev survived the 1930s, and by Bakhtin's life-long reticence about the matter.)

visual representation, has long been understood as a threat to the category of the author in the visual arts. Think of the early artisanal resistance to the daquerreotype expressed in the caricatures of Honoré Daumier and Gérard Fontallard, cartoons in which these artists of the hand scoffed at a medium in which human creativity was reduced to passive clock-watching, in which, as Fontallard put it, "talent comes through sleep." Think of the deliberate cultivation of the "honorific marks of hand labor" (Thorstein Veblen) in the "camera work" of pre-modernist art photographers. And think finally of the contempt for handwork expressed by early modernist photographers, who come to regard the photograph as the product of a machine governed by pure thought. For László Moholy-Nagy, this "new vision" was exercised on the model of engineering; for Edward Weston it relied on a more metaphysical "previsualization." Thus the authority of the artist was re-established on higher ground, that of "intellectual" rather than manual labor.

I am not suggesting that the study of photographic history be reduced in its entirety to this problematic, born of the historical tension between the forces of living labor and those of the "dead labor" invested in machinery. But we do stand to gain in understanding from a materialist social history of photography, a history that takes the interplay of economic and technological considerations into account. Thus we need to develop a history writing in accord with Walter Benjamin's challenge to bourgeois cultural historicism, a challenge influenced by Georg Lukács's philosophical investigation of the effects of the commodity-form on both the material conditions and the subjective culture of capitalist society.⁴ Benjamin's argument has a special pertinence, I think, for a post-modern culture devoted to historical eclecticism, to the random dredging of the archive of past culture. Benjamin recognized that the cultural monuments of the past were the products of a division of labor, of "genius" and "anonymous drudgery":

There is no cultural document that is not at the same time a record of barbarism. No history of culture has yet done justice to this fundamental fact, or can well hope to do so.

Yet this is not the crux of the matter. If the concept of culture is a problematical one for historical materialism, the disintegration of culture into commodities to be possessed by mankind is unthinkable for it. Historical materialism does not regard the work of the past as over and done with. It does not see that work, or any part of it, as falling with convenient quiddity into the lap of any epoch. The concept of culture as the embodiment of entities that are considered independently, if not of the production process in which they arose, then of that in which they continue to survive, is fetishistic. Culture appears reified. Its history is then nothing but the residue of memorable things and events that never broke the surface of human consciousness because they were never truly, that is politically, experienced.⁵

It was in the context of this problem that Benjamin was to speak later of the need for historical materialism to "brush history against the grain."

4. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (1923), trans. Rodney Livingstone, London, 1971, pp. 83-222.

5. Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian" (1937), trans. Kingsley Shorter, in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, London, 1979, pp. 359-360.

6. See my "Photography between Labour and Capital," in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie, eds., *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures: A Selection from the Negative Archives of Shedden Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton 1948-1868*, Halifax, 1983, pp. 193-268.

I see my own critical project now as an attempt to understand the social character of "the traffic in photographs." Taken literally, this traffic involves the social production, circulation, and reception of photographs in a society based on commodity production and exchange. Taken metaphorically, the notion of traffic suggests the peculiar way in which photographic meaning — and the very discourse of photography — is characterized by an incessant oscillation between what Lukács termed the "antinomies of bourgeois thought." This is always a movement between objectivism and subjectivism. Depending on the circumstances, it may also be a movement between rationalism and irrationalism, positivism and metaphysics, scientism and estheticism. We can detect its rhythm in advertising jargon and in criticism.

The first section of the last essay in this volume outlines this project. Its completion will require another book, a substantially different, more historical book than this collection. One already published essay which seeks to develop some of these themes further is not included here.⁶ There are several reasons for this, not least of which are considerations of length and the fact that that text was written as a very specific contribution to a collaborative project, a reading of a particular photographic archive. That essay asks about the institutional and semantic authority of photographic archives. It also examines a lineage of technical realism, tracing the role played by mechanical means in representing technical processes that were themselves subject to mechanization. Thus it is an essay about the photographic representation of work, about the affiliation of photographic realism with the logic and enterprise of engineering. And therefore that essay is a return to some of the themes of the photo works included in this volume.

So this introduction has been an attempt to account for the incompleteness of this book. Rather than make more than infrequent minor revisions in essays that were often originally conceived as very specific interventions in what is now called the "photography boom," I have tried to construct a brief reading — part recollection, part critical revision, part acknowledgment of intellectual influences — of a decade of work.

The "photography boom" has rejuvenated sectors of elite culture and conferred a new prestige upon sectors of mass culture. A vast archive has been opened up for art historical sorting and accreditation. The dramas of modernism are repeated with a new cast of characters; this time, as Marx remarked of the Second Empire, history repeats itself as farce. But there is also a dialogue of opposition and resistance, a dialogue within which I count myself as only one voice. My hope is that this dialogue will move beyond its present institutional limits.

ESSAYS

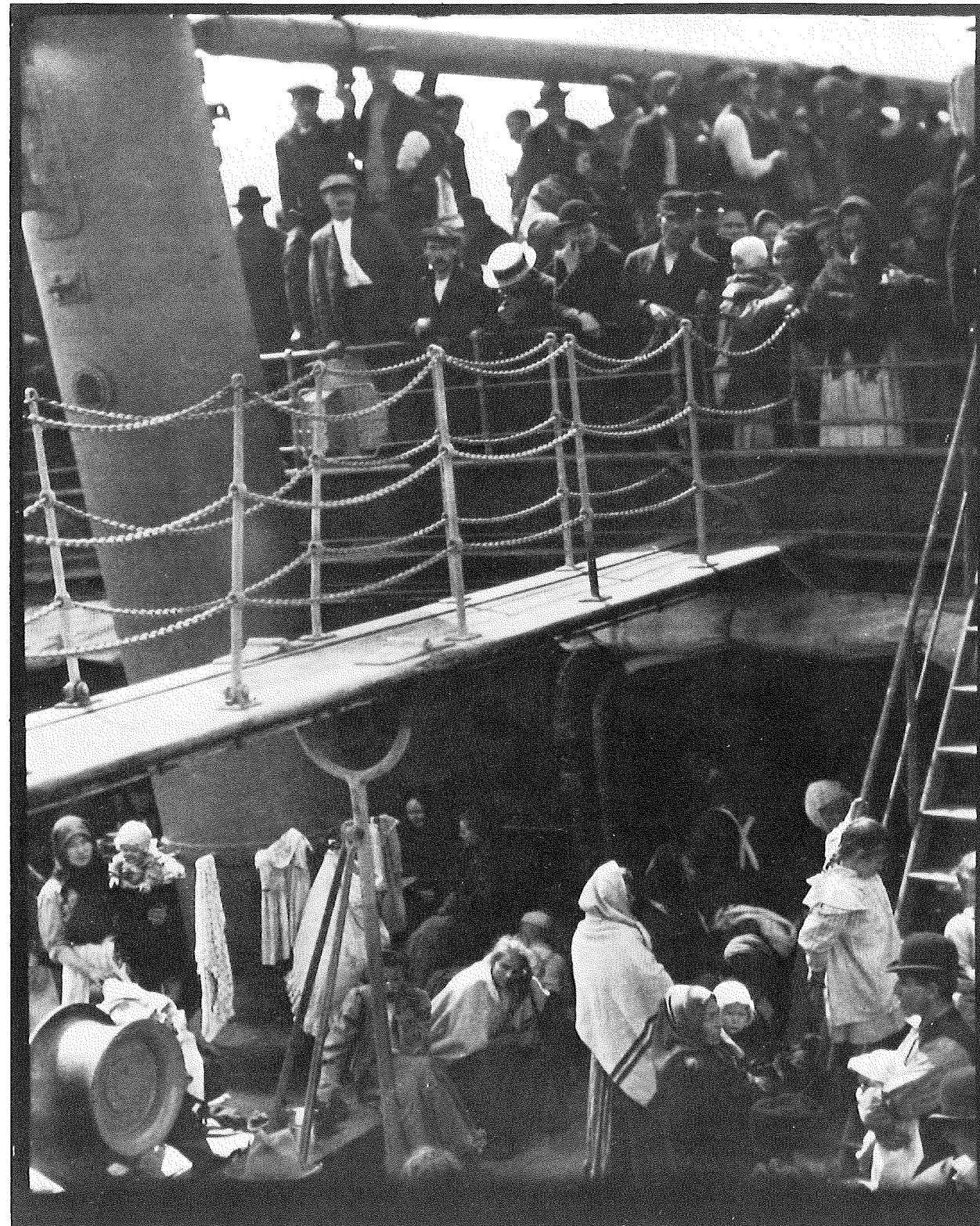


Figure 1: Alfred Stieglitz, *The Steerage*, 1907. Photogravure published in *Camera Work*, October 1911.

On the Invention of Photographic Meaning

I

The meaning of a photograph, like that of any other entity, is inevitably subject to cultural definition. The task here is to define and engage critically something we might call the "photographic discourse." A discourse can be defined as an arena of information exchange, that is, as a system of relations between parties engaged in communicative activity. In a very important sense, the notion of discourse is a notion of limits. That is, the overall discourse relation could be regarded as a limiting function, one that establishes a bounded arena of shared expectations as to meaning. It is this limiting function that determines the very possibility of meaning. To raise the issue of limits, of the closure effected from within any given discourse situation, is to situate oneself *outside*, in a fundamentally metacritical relation to the criticism sanctioned by the logic of the discourse.

Having defined discourse as a system of information exchange, I want to qualify the notion of exchange. All communication is, to a greater or lesser extent, tendentious; all messages are manifestations of interest. No critical model can ignore the fact that interests contend in the real world. We should from the start be wary of succumbing to the liberal-utopian notion of disinterested "academic" exchange of information. The overwhelming majority of messages sent into the "public domain" in advanced industrial society are spoken with the voice of anonymous authority and preclude the possibility of anything but affirmation. When we speak of the necessary agreement between parties engaged in communicative activity, we ought to beware of the suggestion of freely entered social contract. This qualification is necessary because the discussion that follows engages the photograph as a token of exchange both in the hermetic domain of high art and in the popular press.

The latter institution is anything but neutral and anything but open to popular feedback.

With this notion of tendentiousness in mind, we can speak of a message as an embodiment of an argument. In other words, we can speak of a rhetorical function. A discourse, then, can be defined in rather formal terms as the set of relations governing the rhetoric of related utterances. The discourse is, in the most general sense, the context of the utterance, the conditions that constrain and support its meaning, that determine its semantic target.

This general definition implies, of course, that a photograph is an utterance of some sort, that it carries, or is, a message. However, the definition also implies that the photograph is an "incomplete" utterance, a message that depends on some external matrix of conditions and presuppositions for its readability. That is, the meaning of any photographic message is necessarily context determined. We might formulate this position as follows: a photograph communicates by means of its association with some hidden, or implicit text; it is this text, or system of hidden linguistic propositions, that carries the photograph into the domain of readability. (I am using the word "text" rather loosely; we could imagine a discourse situation in which photographs were enveloped in spoken language alone. The word "text" is merely a suggestion of the weighty, institutional character of the semiotic system that lurks behind any given icon.)

Consider for the moment the establishment of a rudimentary discourse situation involving photographs. The anthropologist Melville Herskovits shows a Bush woman a snapshot of her son. She is unable to recognize any image until the details of the photograph are pointed out. Such an inability would seem to be the logical outcome of living in a culture that is unconcerned with the two-dimensional analogue mapping of three-dimensional "real" space, a culture without a realist compulsion.¹ For this woman, the photograph is unmarked as a message, is a "nonmessage," until it is framed linguistically by the anthropologist. A metalinguistic proposition such as "This is a message," or, "This stands for your son," is necessary if the snapshot is to be read.

The Bush woman "learns to read" after learning first that a "reading" is an appropriate outcome of contemplating a piece of glossy paper.

Photographic "literacy" is learned. And yet, in the real world, the image itself appears "natural" and appropriate, appears to manifest an illusory independence from the matrix of suppositions that determines its readability. Nothing could be more natural than a newspaper photo, or, a man pulling a snapshot from his wallet and saying, "This is my dog." Quite regularly, we are informed that the photograph "has its own language," is "beyond speech," is a message of "universal significance" — in short, that photography is a universal and independent language or sign system. Implicit in this argument is the quasi-formalist notion that the photograph derives

1. Melville J. Herskovits, "Art and Value," in R. Redfield, M. Herskovits, G. Ekholm, *Aspects of Primitive Art*, New York, 1959, pp. 56-57.

2. Quoted in Richard Rudisill, *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society*, Albuquerque, 1971, p. 57.

3. Quoted in Rudisill, p. 54.

4. Roland Barthes, "Le message photographique," *Communications*, No. 1, 1961, pp. 127-138; and "Rhétorique de l'image," *Communications*, No. 4, 1964, pp. 40-81. (English translations of these essays have since appeared in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, 1977.)

its semantic properties from conditions that reside within the image itself. But if we accept the fundamental premise that information is the outcome of a culturally determined relationship, then we can no longer ascribe an intrinsic or universal meaning to the photographic image.

But this particularly obstinate bit of bourgeois folklore — the claim for the intrinsic significance of the photograph — lies at the center of the established myth of photographic truth. Put simply, the photograph is seen as a re-presentation of nature itself, as an unmediated copy of the real world. The medium itself is considered transparent. The propositions carried through the medium are unbiased and therefore true. In nineteenth-century writings on photography we repeatedly encounter the notion of the unmediated agency of nature. Both the term "heliography" used by Joseph Nicéphore Niépce and William Henry Fox Talbot's "pencil of nature" implicitly dismissed the human operator and argued for the direct agency of the sun. The American painter Samuel Morse described the daguerreotype in 1840 in these terms:

*... painted by Nature's self with a minuteness of detail, which the pencil of light in her hands alone can trace . . . — they cannot be called copies of nature, but portions of nature herself.*²

In the same year, Edgar Allan Poe argued in a similar vein:

*In truth the daguerreotype plate is infinitely more accurate than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear — but the closest scrutiny of the photographic drawing discloses only a more absolute truth, more perfect identity of aspect with the thing represented.*³

The photograph is imagined to have a primitive core of meaning, devoid of all cultural determination. It is this uninvested analogue that Roland Barthes refers to as the denotative function of the photograph. He distinguishes a second level of invested, culturally determined meaning, a level of connotation.⁴ In the real world no such separation is possible. Any meaningful encounter with a photograph must necessarily occur at the level of connotation. The power of this folklore of pure denotation is considerable. It elevates the photograph to the legal status of document and testimonial. It generates a mythic aura of neutrality around the image. But I have deliberately refused to separate the photograph from a notion of task. A photographic discourse is a system within which the culture harnesses photographs to various representational tasks. Photographs are used to sell cars, commemorate family outings, to impress images of dangerous faces on the memories of post-office patrons, to convince citizens that their taxes did in fact collide gloriously with the moon, to remind us of what we used to look like, to move our passions, to investigate a countryside for traces of an enemy, to advance the careers of photographers, etc. Every photographic image is a sign, above all, of someone's investment in the

sending of a message. Every photographic message is characterized by a tendentious rhetoric. At the same time, the most generalized terms of the photographic discourse constitute a denial of the rhetorical function and a validation of the "truth value" of the myriad propositions made within the system. As we have seen, and shall see again, the most general terms of the discourse are a kind of disclaimer, an assertion of neutrality; in short, the overall function of photographic discourse is to render itself transparent. But however the discourse may deny and obscure its own terms, it cannot escape them.

The problem at hand is one of *sign emergence*; only by developing a historical understanding of the emergence of photographic sign systems can we apprehend the truly *conventional* nature of photographic communication. We need a historically grounded sociology of the image, both in the valorized realm of high art and in the culture at large. What follows is an attempt to define, in historical terms, the relationship between photography and high art.

II

I would like to consider two photographs, one made by Lewis Hine in 1905, the other by Alfred Stieglitz in 1907. The Hine photo has been captioned *Immigrants going down gangplank, New York*; the Stieglitz photo is titled *The Steerage*. I am going to assume a naive relation to these two photos, forgetting for the moment the monumental reputation of the Stieglitz. If possible, I would extend my bogus ignorance to the limit, divesting both images of authorship and context, as though I and the photographs fell from the sky. I am aspiring to a state of innocence, knowing full well that I am bound to slip up. Regarded separately, each image seems to be marked most significantly by the passage of time. My initial inclination is to anchor each image temporally, somewhere within a decade. Already I am incriminating myself. Viewed together, the two photographs seem to occupy a rather narrow iconographic terrain. Gangplanks and immigrants in middle-European dress figure significantly in both. In the Hine photo, a gangplank extends horizontally across the frame, angling outward, toward the camera. A man, almost a silhouette, appears ready to step up onto the gangplank. He carries a bundle, his body is bounded by the left edge of the photo. Two women precede the man across the gangplank. Both are dressed in long skirts; the woman on the right, who is in the lead, carries a large suitcase. Given this information, it would be somewhat difficult to identify either the gangplank or the immigrant status of the three figures without the aid of the legend. In the Stieglitz photo, a gangplank, broken by the left border, extends across an open hold and intersects an upper deck. Both this upper deck and the one below are crowded with people: women in shawls, Slavic-looking women in black scarves holding babies, men in collarless shirts and worker's caps. Some of the people are sitting, some appear to be engaged in conversation. One man on the



Figure 2: Lewis Hine, *Immigrants going down gangplank, New York, 1905*.

upper deck attracts my eye, perhaps because his boater hat is a highly reflective ellipse in a shadowy area, or perhaps because his hat seems atypical in this milieu. The overall impression is one of a crowded and impoverished seagoing domesticity. There is no need even to attempt a "comprehensive" reading at this level.

Although rather deadpan, this is hardly an innocent reading of the two photographs. I have constructed a scenario within which both images appear to occupy one end of a discourse situation in common, as though they were stills from the same movie, a documentary on immigration perhaps. But suppose I asserted the autonomy of each image instead. For the moment, I decide that both images are art and that a meaningful engagement with the two photographs will result in their placement, relative to each other, on some scale of "quality." Clearly, such a decision forces an investment in some theory of "quality photography," already the possibility of anything approaching a neutral reading seems to have vanished.

Undeterred, I decide that quality in photography is a question of design, that the photograph is a figurative arrangement of tones in a two-dimensional, bounded field. I find the Hine attractive (or unattractive) in its mindless straightforwardness, in the casual and repetitive disposition of figures across the frame, in the suggestion of a single vector. And I find the Stieglitz attractive (or unattractive) for its complex array of converging and diverging lines, as though it were a profound attempt at something that looked like Cubism. On the other hand, suppose I decide that quality in photographic art resides in the capacity for narrative. On what grounds do I establish a judgment of narrative quality in relation to these two artifacts, the Hine and the Stieglitz? I like/dislike, am moved/unmoved by the absolute banality of the event suggested by the Hine; I like/dislike, am moved/unmoved by the suggestion of epic squalor in the Stieglitz. The problem I am confronted with is that every move I could possibly make within these reading systems devolves almost immediately into a literary invention with a trivial relation to the artifacts at hand. The image is appropriated as the object of a secondary artwork, a literary artwork with the illusory status of "criticism." Again, we find ourselves in the middle of a discourse situation that refuses to acknowledge its boundaries; photographs appear as messages in the void of nature. We are forced, finally, to acknowledge what Barthes calls the "polysemic" character of the photographic image, the existence of a "floating chain of significance, underlying the signifier."⁵ In other words, the photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the *possibility* of meaning. Only by its embeddedness in a concrete discourse situation can the photograph yield a clear semantic outcome. Any given photograph is conceivably open to appropriation by a range of "texts," each new discourse situation generating its own set of messages. We see this happening repeatedly: the anonymously rendered flash-lit murder on the front page of the *Daily News* is ap-

5. Barthes, "Rhétorique de l'image," p. 44.

propriated by The Museum of Modern Art as an exemplary moment in the career of the primitive freelance genius Weegee; Hine prints that originally appeared in social-work journals reappear in a biographical treatment of his career as an artist only to reappear in labor-union pamphlets. Furthermore, it is impossible even to conceive of an *actual* photograph in a "free-state," unattached to a system of validation and support, that is, to a discourse. Even the invention of such a state, of a neutral ground, constitutes the establishment of a discourse situation founded on a mythic idea of bourgeois intellectual privilege, involving a kind of "tourist sensibility" directed at the photograph. Such an invention, as we have already seen, is the denial of invention, the denial of the critic's status as social actor.

How then are we to build a criticism that can account for the differences or similarities in the semantic structures of the Hine and Stieglitz photographs? It seems that only by beginning to uncover the social and historical contexts of the two photographers can we begin to acquire an understanding of meaning as related to intention. The question to be answered is this: what, in the broadest sense, was the *original* rhetorical function of the Stieglitz and the Hine?

Stieglitz's *Steerage* first appeared in *Camera Work* in 1911. *Camera Work* was solely Stieglitz's invention and remained under his direct control for its entire fourteen-year history. It is useful to consider *Camera Work* as an artwork in its own right, as a sort of monumental container for smaller, subordinate works. In a profound sense, Stieglitz was a magazine artist; not unlike Hugh Hefner, he was able to shape an entire discourse situation. The covers of *Camera Work* framed avant-garde discourse, in the other arts as well as in photography, in the United States between 1903 and 1917, and whatever appeared between these covers passed through Stieglitz's hands. Few artists have been able to maintain such control over the context in which their work appeared.

Through *Camera Work* Stieglitz established a genre where there had been none; the magazine outlined the terms under which photography could be considered art, and stands as an implicit text, as scripture, behind every photograph that aspires to the status of high art. *Camera Work* treated the photograph as a central object of the discourse, while inventing, more thoroughly than any other source, the myth of the semantic autonomy of the photographic image. In this sense, *Camera Work* necessarily denied its own intrinsic role, as text, in the valorization of the photograph.

Seen as a monumental framing device, *Camera Work* can be dissected into a number of subordinate ploys: one of the most obvious is the physical manner in which photographs were presented within the magazine. The reproductions themselves were quite elegant; it has been claimed that they often were tonally superior to the originals. Stieglitz tipped in the gravures himself. Each image was printed on extremely fragile tissue; the viewer

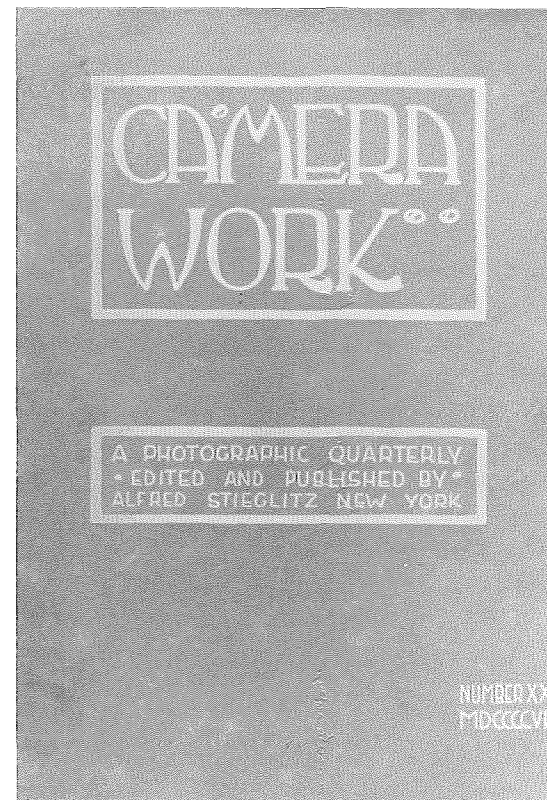


Figure 3: *Camera Work*, October 1907.

could see the print only by carefully separating the two blank sheets of heavier paper that protected it. One of these sheets provided a backing for the otherwise translucent image. The gravures were often toned, usually in sepias but occasionally in violets, blues, or greens. No more than a dozen or so prints were included in any one issue of the magazine, and these were usually distributed in groupings of three or four throughout the text. No titles or legends were included with the images; instead they were printed on a separate page prefacing each section of photographs.

The point quite simply is this: the photographs in *Camera Work* are marked as precious objects, as products of extraordinary craftsmanship. The very title *Camera Work* connotes craftsmanship. This may seem like a trivial assertion when viewed from a contemporary vantage point — we are by now quite used to "artful" reproductions of photographs. But it was *Camera Work* that established the tradition of elegance in photographic reproduction; here again is a clear instance of sign emergence. For the first time the photographic reproduction signifies an intrinsic value, a value that resides in its immediate physical nature, its "craftedness." The issue is not trivial; consider the evolving relationship between craftsmanship and the large-scale industrial reproduction of images in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With the invention of the ruled cross-line halftone screen in the late 1880s, photographs became accessible to offset printing, allowing rapid mechanical reproduction of photographic copy. *Camera Work's* fourteen-year history parallels the proliferation of cheap photographic reproductions in the "mass" media. By 1910 "degraded" but informative reproductions appeared in almost every illustrated newspaper, magazine, and journal. Given this context, *Camera Work* stands as an almost Pre-Raphaelite celebration of craft in the teeth of industrialism. In a technological sense, the most significant feature of the photograph is its reproducibility; the status of the photograph as "unique object" had an early demise with Talbot's invention of a positive-negative process. And yet the discourse situation established around the unique image in *Camera Work* is prefigured historically in the folklore that surrounded the daguerreotype. The daguerreotype process produced a single, irreproducible silver image on a small copper plate. Photographic literature of the 1840s is characterized by an obsession with the jewel-like properties of the image:

*The specimen at Chilton is a most remarkable gem in its way. It looks like fairy work, and changes its color like a camellion according to the hue of the approximating objects.*⁶

Manifesting a kind of primitive value, a value invested in the object by nature, the daguerreotype achieved the status of the aeolian harp. The fetishism surrounding the daguerreotype had other manifestations, all stemming from a popular uncertainty about the process; women were commonly held to feel their eyes "drawn" to-

6. *New York Morning Herald*, September 30, 1839, quoted in Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene*, New York, 1938, p. 16.

ward the lens while being photographed.⁷ The daguerreotype took on the power of evoking the presence of the dead. Dead children were photographed as though asleep. In one documented case, the camera was thought to be capable of conjuring up an image of a long buried infant.⁸

But outright spiritualism represents only one pole of 19th-century photographic discourse. Photographs achieve semantic status as fetish objects *and* as documents. The photograph is imagined to have, depending on its context, a power that is primarily affective or a power that is primarily informative. Both powers reside in the mythical truth value of the photograph. But this folklore unknowingly distinguishes two separate truths: the truth of magic and the truth of science. The fetish (such as the daguerreotype of a dead child) evokes meaning by virtue of its imaginary status as relic — that is, by the transcendental truth of magic. The evocation is imagined to occur in an affectively charged arena, an arena of sentiment bounded by nostalgia on one end and hysteria on the other. The image is also invested with a magical power to penetrate appearances and thus to transcend the visible; to reveal, for example, secrets of human character.

At the other pole is what I have chosen to call the “informative” function of the photograph, that by which it has the legal power of proof; this function is grounded in empiricism. From this point of view the photograph represents the real world by a simple metonymy: the photograph stands for the object or event that is curtailed at its spatial or temporal boundaries, or, it stands for a contextually related object or event. An image of a man’s face stands for a man, and perhaps, in turn, for a class of men. Thus, bureaucratic “rationalism” seized the photograph as a tool; the Paris police, for example, appropriated photography as an instrument of class war when they documented the faces of the survivors of the Commune of 1871. Here was an early instance of the photographic identity card and the photographic wanted poster; other equally “rational” functions were invented for photography during the 19th century; solemn portraits of American Indians were made as the race was exterminated; French imperial conquests in Egypt were memorialized. Reproduced, these images served as an ideologically charged reification of the expanding boundaries of the bourgeois state. The mythical image of the “frontier” was realized by means of photographs. While theories of affect regard the photograph as a unique and privately engaged object, informative value is typically coupled to the mass reproduction of the image. The *carte-de-visite* represented a move in this direction; presumably, every French peasant could own a visiting-card portrait of Louis Napoleon and family. According to Walter Benjamin, mass reproduction represents a qualitative as well as a quantitative change in the status of the photographic message. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936) he defined a developing antagonism between artwork as unique-and-precious-object and

7. *Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1849, quoted in Rudisill, p. 209.

8. *Daguerreian Journal*, January 15, 1851, quoted in Rudisill, p. 218.

9. Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, 1969, pp. 217-251.

10. Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, London, 1899, pp. 28-44.

11. Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, “The Death of Art in the 19th Century,” in Linda Nochlin, ed., *Realism and Tradition in Art 1848-1900*, Englewood Cliffs, 1966, p. 17.

artwork as reproducible entity.⁹ In Benjamin’s terms, the unique artwork is necessarily a privileged object. The unique art object stands in the center of a discourse within which ideology is obscured; the photograph, on the other hand, is characterized by a reproducibility, an “exhibition value,” that widens the field of potential readers, that permits a penetration into the “unprivileged” spaces of the everyday world. As a vehicle for explicit political argument, the photograph stands at the service of the class that controls the press.

French romantic and proto-symbolist criticism saw both journalism and photography as enemies of art. The complaints against the emergent “democratic” media were couched in esthetic terms but devolve, almost always, into a class hatred aimed at both the middle and working classes coupled with a hopeless fantasy of restoration. Théophile Gautier expended the preface of his 1834 novel *Mademoiselle de Maupin* in an assault on Fourier, Saint-Simon, and the realist-utilitarian demands of republican journalism:

... a book does not make gelatin soup; a novel is not a pair of seamless boots; a sonnet, a syringe with a continuous jet; or a drama, a railway. . . .

Charles X. . . by ordering the suppression of the newspapers, did a great service to the arts and to civilization [Newspapers] deaden inspiration and fill heart and intellect with such distrust; that we dare not have faith either in a poet or government; and thus royalty and poetry, the two greatest things in the world, become impossible. . . .

If Louis-Philippe were to suppress the literary and political journals for good and all, I should be infinitely grateful to him¹⁰

Edmond and Jules de Goncourt argue in a similar vein (1854):

Industry will kill art. Industry and art are two enemies which nothing will reconcile. . . .

Industry starts out from the useful; it aims toward that which is profitable for the greatest number; it is the bread of the people.

Art starts out from the useless; it aims toward that which is agreeable to the few. It is the egotistic adornment of aristocracies. . . .

Art has nothing to do with the people. Hand over the beautiful to universal suffrage and what becomes of the beautiful? The people rise to art only when art descends to the people.¹¹

Finally we come to Baudelaire’s famous dictum on photography, from his epistolary review of the Salon of 1859:

... a new industry arose which contributed not a little to confirm stupidity in its faith and to ruin whatever might remain to the divine in the French mind. The idolatrous mob demanded an ideal worthy of itself and appropriate to its nature — that is perfectly understood. In matters of painting and sculpture, the present-day Credo of the sophisticated, above all in France . . . is this: “I believe in Nature, and I believe only in Nature (there are good reasons for that). I believe that Art is, and cannot be other than, the exact reproduction of Nature Thus an industry that could give us a

result identical to Nature would be the absolute of art." A revengeful God has given ear to the prayers of this multitude. Daguerre was his Messiah. And now the faithful says to himself: "Since Photography gives us every guarantee of exactitude that we could desire (they really believe that, the mad fools!), then Photography and Art are the same thing." From that moment our squalid society rushed, Narcissus to a man, to gaze at its trivial image on a scrap of metal. . . . Some democratic writer ought to have seen here a cheap method of disseminating a loathing for history and for painting among the people. . . .¹²

Where does this rhetoric, the rhetoric of emergent estheticism, stand in relation to *Camera Work*? The American avant-garde was invented in French terms; the tradition of a dead generation of French intellectuals weighed on Stieglitz's brain like a nightmare. Photography necessarily had to overcome the stigma of its definition at the hands of Baudelaire. The invention of photography as high art is grounded fundamentally in the rhetoric of romanticism and symbolism. The fundamental ploy in this elevation is the establishment of the photograph's value, not as primitive jewel, not as fact, but as cameo, to use Gautier's metaphor for his poems. Within this mythos the photograph displays a preciousness that is the outcome of high craftsmanship. This craftsmanship is primarily that of the poet, while only marginally that of the workman.

The thirty-sixth issue of *Camera Work*, the issue in which *The Steerage* appeared for the first time, was a Stieglitz retrospective of sorts. Sixteen photographs covering a period of eighteen years (1892-1910) were included. No other photographers' work appeared in this issue; the only other illustration was a Picasso drawing, the first to be reproduced in the magazine. Among the Stieglitz gravures are *The Hand of Man*; *The Terminal*; *Spring Showers, New York*; *The Mauritania*; *The Aeroplane*; and *The Dirigible*. The prints cluster around a common iconographic terrain; they are marked by a kind of urban-technological emphasis, marked as a kind of landscape emerging out of an industrial culture. This terrain is defined negatively by its exclusion of portraiture and "natural" landscape, although Stieglitz produced images of both types in his early career. I think we can discern a kind of montage principle at work, a principle by which a loose concatenation of images limits the polysemic character of any given component image. I would argue, however, that this apparent attempt at "thematic unity" is less functional in establishing an arena of photographic meaning than the critical writing that appears in another section of the magazine. The major piece of criticism that appears in this particular issue is Benjamin de Casseres' "The Unconscious in Art." Without mentioning photography, Casseres establishes the general conditions for reading Stieglitz:

... there are aesthetic emotions for which there are no corresponding thoughts, emotions that awaken the Unconscious alone and that never touch the brain; emotions vague, indefinable, confused; emotions that wake whirlwinds and deep-sea hurricanes. . . .

12. Charles Baudelaire, "The Modern Public and Photography," in *Art in Paris 1845-1862*, trans. Jonathan Mayne, London, 1965, pp. 153-154.



Figure 4: Alfred Stieglitz, *The Dirigible*, 1910. Photogravure published in *Camera Work*, October 1911.

13. Benjamin de Casseres, "The Unconscious in Art," *Camera Work*, no. 36, October 1911, p. 17.

Imagination is the dream of the Unconscious. It is the realm of the gorgeous, monstrous hallucinations of the Unconscious. It is the *hasheesh* of genius. Out of the head of the artist issues all the beauty that is transferred to canvas, but the roots of his imagination lie deeper than his personality.

The soul of the genius is the safety-vault of the race, the treasure pocket of the Unconscious soul of the world. Here age after age the Secretive God stores in dreams. And the product of genius overwhelms us because it has collaborated with the Infinite.¹³

It would be hard to find a better example of modern bourgeois esthetic mysticism. In its own time, of course, this piece was hardly an expression of institutional esthetics, but stood as the rhetoric of a vanguard, moving beyond the romantic-symbolist catechism of "genius and the imagination" into proto-Surrealism. And yet the echoes of Poe and Baudelaire are explicit to the point of redundancy. Casseres' argument has its roots in a discourse situation from which photography, in its "mechanical insistence on truth" had been excluded. In *Camera Work*, however, this text serves to elevate photography to the status of poetry, painting and sculpture. A drastic boundary shift has occurred, an overlap of photographic discourse and esthetic discourse where no such arena had existed, except in the most trivial terms. Casseres' inflated symbolist polemic both frames and is a manifestation of this emergent discourse situation. But in order to get close to the semantic expectations surrounding any specific artwork, such as *The Steerage*, we need evidence more substantial than polemic. In 1942 a portion of Stieglitz's memoirs was published in Dorothy Norman's journal *Twice-A-Year*, including a short text called "How *The Steerage* Happened:"

Early in June, 1907, my small family and I sailed for Europe. My wife insisted upon going on the "Kaiser Wilhelm II" — the fashionable ship of the North German Lloyd at the time. . . . How I hated the atmosphere of the first class on the ship. One couldn't escape the *nouveaux riches*. . . .

On the third day I finally couldn't stand it any longer. I had to get away from that company. I went as far forward on deck as I could. . . .

As I came to the end of the deck I stood alone, looking down. There were men and women and children on the lower deck of the steerage. There was a narrow stairway leading up to the upper deck of the steerage, a small deck right at the bow of the steamer.

To the left was an inclining funnel and from the upper steerage deck there was fastened a gangway bridge which was glistening in its freshly painted state. It was rather long, white, and during the trip remained untouched by anyone.

On the upper deck, looking over the railing, there was a young man with a straw hat. The shape of the hat was round. He was watching the men and women and children on the lower steerage deck. Only men were on the upper deck. The whole scene fascinated me. I longed to escape from my surroundings and join these people. . . .

I saw shapes related to each other. I saw a picture of shapes and underlying that of the feeling I had about life. And as I was deciding, should I try to put down this seemingly new vision that held me — people, the common people, the feeling of ship and ocean and sky and the feeling of release that I was

away from the mob called the rich — Rembrandt came into my mind and I wondered would he have felt as I was feeling. . . .

I had but one plate holder with one unexposed plate. Would I get what I saw, what I felt? Finally I released the shutter. My heart thumping. I had never heard my heart thump before. Had I gotten my picture? I knew if I had, another milestone in photography would have been reached, related to the milestone of my "Car Horses" made in 1892, and my "Hand of Man" made in 1902, which had opened up a new era of photography, of seeing. In a sense it would go beyond them, for here would be a picture based on related shapes and on the deepest human feeling, a step in my own evolution, a spontaneous discovery.

I took my camera to my stateroom and as I returned to my steamer chair my wife said, "I had sent a steward to look for you. . . ." I told her where I had been.

She said, "You speak as if you were far away in a distant world," and I said I was.

"How you seem to hate these people in the first class." No, I didn't hate them, but I merely felt completely out of place. (Emphasis mine.)¹⁴

As I see it, this text is pure symbolist autobiography. Even a superficial reading reveals the extent to which Stieglitz invented himself in symbolist clichés. An ideological division is made; Stieglitz proposes two worlds: a world that entraps and a world that liberates. The first world is populated by his wife and the nouveaux-riches, the second by "the common people." The photograph is taken at the intersection of the two worlds, looking out, as it were. The gangplank stands as a barrier between Stieglitz and the scene. The photographer marks a young man in a straw hat as a spectator, suggesting this figure as an embodiment of Stieglitz as Subject. The possibility of escape resides in a mystical identification with the Other: "I longed to escape from my surroundings and join these people." I am reminded of Baudelaire's brief fling as a republican editorialist during the 1848 revolution. The symbolist avenues away from the bourgeoisie are clearly defined: identification with the imaginary aristocracy, identification with Christianity, identification with Rosicrucianism, identification with Satanism, identification with the imaginary proletariat, identification with imaginary Tahitians, and so on. But the final Symbolist hideout is in the Imagination, and in the fetishized products of the Imagination. Stieglitz comes back to his wife with a glass negative from the other world.

For Stieglitz, *The Steerage* is a highly valued illustration of this autobiography. More than an illustration, it is an embodiment; that is, the photograph is imagined to contain the autobiography. The photograph is invested with a complex metonymic power, a power that transcends the perceptual and passes into the realm of affect. The photograph is believed to encode the totality of an experience, to stand as a phenomenological equivalent of Stieglitz-being-in-that-place. And yet this metonymy is so attenuated that it passes into metaphor. That is to say, Stieglitz's reductivist compulsion is so extreme, his faith in the power of the image so intense, that he denies the iconic level of the image and makes his claim for meaning at the level of abstraction. Instead of the possible metonymic

14. Dorothy Norman, ed., "Alfred Stieglitz: Four Happenings," reprinted in Nathan Lyons, ed., *Photographers on Photography*, Englewood Cliffs, 1966, pp. 129-130.



Figure 5: Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent*, Series XX, No. 3, 1929.

15. Alfred Stieglitz, "How I Came to Photograph Clouds" (1923), reprinted in Lyons, p. 112.

16. Eric Johnson, "The Composer's Vision: Photographs by Ernest Bloch," *Aperture*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1972, n.p.

equation: common people = my alienation, we have the reduced, metaphorical equation: shapes = my alienation. Finally by a process of semantic diffusion we are left with the trivial and absurd assertion: shapes = feelings.

This is Clive Bell's notion of significant form. All specificity except the specificity of form is pared away from the photograph until it stands transformed into an abstraction. But all theories of abstraction are denials of the necessity of metalanguage, of the embeddedness of the artwork in a discourse. Only if the reader has been informed that "this is symbolist art" or "this photograph is a metaphor" can he/she invest the photograph with a meaning appropriate to Stieglitz's expectations. With a proposition of this order supplying the frame for the reading, the autobiography, or some related fictional text, can be read back into the image. That is, the reader is privileged to reinvent, on the basis of this photograph, the saga of the alienated creative genius. Casseres' "The Unconscious in Art" provides the model.

Stieglitz's career represents the triumph of metaphor in the realm of photography. *The Steerage* prefigures the later, explicitly metaphorical works, the *Equivalents*. By the time Stieglitz arrived at his equation of cloud photographs and music, the suggestion of narrative had been dropped entirely from the image:

I wanted a series of photographs which when seen by Ernest Bloch . . . he would exclaim: Music! Music! Man, why that is music! How did you ever do that? And he would point to violins, and flutes, and oboes, and brass . . .¹⁵

The late-romantic artist's compulsion to achieve what Walter Pater termed the "condition of music" is a desire to abandon all contextual reference and to convey meaning by virtue of a metaphorical substitution. In photography this compulsion requires an incredible denial of the image's status as report. The final outcome of this denial is the discourse situation represented by Minor White and *Aperture* magazine. The photograph is reduced to an arrangement of tones. The gray scale, ranging from full white to full black, stands as a sort of phonological carrier system for a vague prelinguistic scale of affect.

Predictably, Baudelaire's celebration of synesthesia, of the correspondence of the senses, is echoed in *Aperture*:

Both photographer and musician work with similar fundamentals. The scale of continuous gray from black to white, within a photographic print, is similar to the unbroken scales of pitch and loudness in music. A brilliant reflecting roof, can be heard as a high pitch or a very loud note against a general fabric of sound or gray tone. This background fabric serves as a supporting structure for either melodic or visual shapes.¹⁶

Minor White, true to Baudelaire, couples correspondence to affect; an interior state is expressed by means of the image:

When the photographer shows us what he considers to be an Equivalent, he is showing us an expression of a feeling, but this feeling is not the feeling he had for the object that he

photographed. What really happened is that he recognized an object or a series of forms that, when photographed, would yield an image with specific suggestive powers that can direct the viewer into a specific and known feeling, state or place within himself.¹⁷

With White the denial of iconography is complete. *Aperture* proposes a community of mystics united in the exchange of fetishes. The photograph is restored to its primitive status as "cult object." White's recent *Aperture* publication *Octave of Prayer* (1972) is a polemical assertion of the photograph's efficacy as a locus of prayer and meditation.

I would argue that the devolution of photographic art into mystical trivia is the result of a fundamental act of closure. This closure was effected in the first place in order to establish photography as an art. A clear boundary has been drawn between photography and its social character. In other words, the ills of photography are the ills of estheticism. Estheticism must be superseded, in its entirety, for a meaningful art, of any sort, to emerge. The Kantian separation of the esthetic idea from conceptual knowledge and interest is an act of philosophical closure with a profound influence on romanticism, and through romanticism, on estheticism. By the time *Camera Work* appeared, idealist esthetics had been reduced to a highly polemical program by Benedetto Croce:

*Ideality (as this property which distinguishes intuition from concept, art from philosophy and history, from assertion of the universal, and from perception of narration of events, has also been called) is the quintessence of art. As soon as reflection or judgment develops out of that state of ideality, art vanishes and dies. It dies in the artist, who changes from artist and becomes his own critic; it dies in the spectator or listener, who from rapt contemplator of art changes into a thoughtful observer of life.*¹⁸

Croce is the critical agent of the expressive. Art is defined by reduction as the "true aesthetic a priori synthesis of feeling and image within intuition;"¹⁹ any physical, utilitarian, moral, or conceptual significance is denied. In the *Aesthetic* (1901), Croce wrote:

*And if photography be not quite an art, that is precisely because the element of nature in it remains more or less unconquered and ineradicable. Do we ever, indeed, feel complete satisfaction before even the best of photographs? Would not an artist vary and touch up much or little, remove or add something to all of them?*²⁰

Croce had an impact of sorts on American photography through Paul Strand. Strand's reply to the argument above is revealing:

*Signor Croce is speaking of the shortcomings of photographers and not of photography. He has not seen, for the simple reason that it did not exist when he wrote his book, fully achieved photographic expression. In the meantime the twaddle about the limitations of photography has been answered by Stieglitz and a few others of us here in America, by work done. (Emphasis mine.)*²¹

17. Minor White, "Equivalence: The Perennial Trend" (1963), reprinted in Lyons, p. 170.

22. Roger Fry, "An Essay in Aesthetics" (1909), in *Vision and Design*, Cleveland and New York, 1956, pp. 16-38. Clive Bell, "What is Art?" (1913), in *Art*, New York, 1958, pp. 13-55.

18. Benedetto Croce, *Guide to Aesthetics* (1913), trans. Patrick Romanell, New York, 1965, p. 15.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

20. Benedetto Croce, *Aesthetic: As Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, trans. Douglas Ainslie, New York, 1953, p. 17.

21. Paul Strand, "Photography and the New God" (1922), reprinted in Lyons, p. 143.

Strand's rebuttal is, in fact, a submission to the terms of idealist esthetics. The "element of nature" is eradicated by denying the representational status of the photograph.

Croce, Roger Fry, and Clive Bell form a kind of loose esthetic syndicate around early 20th-century art. Fry's separation of the "imaginative" and the "actual" life, and Bell's "significant form" are further manifestations of the closure effected around modernist art.²² These critics represent the legitimacy that photography aspired to. The invention of the "photographer of genius" is possible only through a disassociation of the image maker from the social embeddedness of the image. The invention of the photograph as high art was only possible through its transformation into an abstract fetish, into "significant form."

With all this said, we can return finally to Lewis Hine. Hine stands clearly outside the discourse situation represented by *Camera Work*; any attempt to engage his work within the conditions of that discourse must necessarily deprive him of his history. While *The Steerage* is denied any social meaning from *within*, that is, is enveloped in a reductivist and mystical intentionality from the beginning, the Hine photograph can only be appropriated or "lifted" into such an arena of denial. The original discourse situation around Hine is hardly esthetic, but political. In other words, the Hine discourse displays a manifest politics and only an implicit esthetics, while the Stieglitz discourse displays a manifest esthetics and only an implicit politics. A Hine photograph in its original context is an explicit political utterance. As such, it is *immediately* liable to a criticism that is political, just as *The Steerage* is *mediately* liable to a criticism that is political.

Hine was a sociologist. His work originally appeared in a liberal-reformist social-work journal first called *Charities and Commons* and then the *Survey*. He also wrote and "illustrated" pamphlets for the National Child Labor Committee and eventually was employed by the Red Cross, photographing European refugees after the First World War. I think it is important to try, briefly, to define the politics represented by *Charities and Commons* and *Survey* during the early part of this century. The magazines represent the voice of the philanthropic agents of capital, of an emergent reformist bureaucracy that, for its lack of a clear institutional status, has the look of a political threat to capital. The publications committee included Jane Addams, Jacob Riis, and William Guggenheim. Articles were written by state labor inspectors, clergymen, prohibitionists, probation officers, public health officials, dispensers of charity and a few right-wing socialists and had such titles as "Community Care of Drunkards," "Industrial Accidents and the Social Cost," "The Boy Runaway," "Fire Waste," "Children and Industrial Parasites," "Strike Violence and the Public." Politically the magazines stood clearly to the right of the Socialist Party, but occasionally they employed "socialist" polemic (especially in editorial cartoons) on reform issues.

A photograph like *Immigrants going down gangplank* is embedded in a complex political argument about the influx of aliens, cheap labor, ghetto housing and sanitation, the teaching of English, and so on. But I think we can distinguish two distinct levels of meaning in Hine's photography. These two levels of connotation are characteristic of the rhetoric of liberal reform. If we look at a photograph like *Neil Gallagher, worked two years in breaker. Leg crushed between cars. Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. November, 1909*, and another like *A Madonna of the Tenements* we can distinguish the two connotations. One type of meaning is primary in the first photo; the other type of meaning is primary in the second.

Neil Gallagher is standing next to the steps of what looks like an office building. His right hand rests on a concrete pedestal, his left leans on the crutch that supports the stump of his left leg. About fifteen, he wears a suit, a cap and a tie. He confronts the camera directly from the center of the frame. Now I would argue that this photograph and its caption have the status of legal document. The photograph and text are submitted as evidence in an attempt to effect legislation. The caption anchors the image, giving it an empirical validity, marking the abuse in its specificity. At the same time, Neil Gallagher stands as a metonymic representation of a class of victimized child laborers. But the photograph has another level of meaning, a secondary connotation. Neil Gallagher is named in the caption, granted something more than a mere statistical anonymity, more than the status of "injured child." Hine was capable of photographing child workers as adults, which may be one of the mysteries of his style of interaction with his subject, or it may be that these laborers do not often display "childish" characteristics. The squareness with which Gallagher takes his stance, both on the street and in the frame, suggests a triumph over his status as victim. And yet the overall context is reform; in a political sense, every one of Hine's subjects is restored to the role of victim. What is connoted finally on this secondary level is "the dignity of the oppressed." *Neil Gallagher*, then, functions as two metonymic levels. The legend functions at both levels, is both an assertion of legal fact and a dispensation of dignity to the person represented. Once anchored by the caption, the photograph itself stands, in its typicality, for a legally verifiable class of injuries and for the "humanity" of a class of wage laborers. What I am suggesting is that we can separate a level of *report*, of empirically grounded rhetoric, and a level of "spiritual" rhetoric.

This second type of rhetoric informs *A Madonna of the Tenements* in its entirety. This photograph appeared on the cover of the *Survey*, in a circular vignette. A Slavic-looking woman sits holding her four- or five-year-old daughter. Another child, a boy of about nine, kneels at his mother's side with his left hand against his sister's side. The woman looks pensive; the daughter looks as though she might be ill; the boy looks concerned until we detect the suggestion of an encroaching smile in his features. The dress of the



Figure 6: Lewis Hine, *Neil Gallagher, worked two years in breaker. Leg crushed between cars. Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. November 1909.*

family is impoverished but neat; the daughter wears no shoes but the boy wears a tie. An unfocused wall-paper pattern is visible in the background. The overall impression is of a concerned and loving family relationship. In a sense, what is connoted by this image is the capacity of the alien poor for human sentiment. In addition, the image is invested with a considerable element of religiosity by the title, *Madonna*. That is, this woman and her family are allowed to stand for the purely spiritual elevation of the poor.

A passage in Judith Gutman's biography of Hine suggests his esthetic roots in 19th-century realism:

... he quoted George Eliot ... as he spoke to the Conference of Charities and Corrections in Buffalo in 1909 ... "do not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the reign of art those old women with work-worn hands scraping carrots, ... those rounded backs and weather-beaten faces that have bent over the spade and done the rough work of the world, those homes with their tin pans, their brown pitchers, their rough curs and their clusters of onions. It is needful that we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them out of our religion and our philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit the world of extremes."²³

If Hine ever read an essay entitled "What is Art?," it was not Croce's version, or Clive Bell's, but Tolstoy's:

The task for art to accomplish is to make that feeling of brotherhood and love of one's neighbor, now attained only by the best members of society, the customary feeling and instinct of all men. By evoking under imaginary conditions the feeling of brotherhood and love, religious art will train men to experience those same feelings under similar circumstances in actual life; it will lay in the souls of men the rails along which the actions of those whom art thus educates will naturally pass. And universal art, by uniting the most different people in one common feeling by destroying separation, will educate people to union and will show them, not by reason but by life itself, the joy of universal union reaching beyond the bounds set by life. ...

The task of Christian art is to establish brotherly union among men.²⁴

Hine is an artist in the tradition of Millet and Tolstoy, a realist mystic. His realism corresponds to the status of the photograph as report, his mysticism corresponds to its status as spiritual expression. What these two connotative levels suggest is an artist who partakes of two roles. The first role, which determines the empirical value of the photograph as report, is that of *witness*. The second role, through which the photograph is invested with spiritual significance, is that of *seer*, and entails the notion of expressive genius. It is at this second level that Hine can be appropriated by bourgeois esthetic discourse, and invented as a significant "primitive" figure in the history of photography.²⁵

III

I would like to conclude with a rather schematic summary. All photographic communication seems to take place within the con-

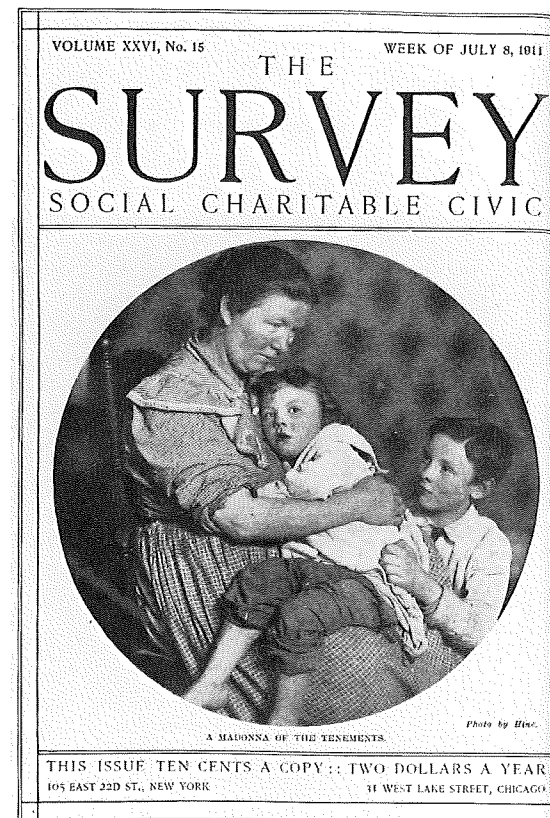


Figure 7: *The Survey*, July 8, 1911. Cover photograph by Lewis Hine, *A Madonna of the Tenements*.

23. Judith Mara Gutman, *Lewis W. Hine and the American Social Conscience*, New York, 1967, p. 29. Hine was quoting George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1857). Hine's talk, entitled "Social Photography," has since been reprinted in Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography*, New Haven, 1981, pp. 109-113.

24. Leo Tolstoy, *What is Art?* (1898), trans. Aylmer Maude, London, 1930, p. 288.

25. Reading this passage ten years later, I find the description of Hine as a "realist mystic" more than a bit silly. Like many Progressive Era reformers, Hine was both a positivist and a moral crusader. His moralism — a moralism based in part on bourgeois familial sentiment — occasionally found its strongest iconographic expression and ideological force in borrowings from Christian painting. While enlisted in a

developing project of secular, "scientific," philanthropy, Hine appealed also to the more traditional values of Christian charity. Thus his "madonnas" are both sacred and secular icons.

26. For theoretical background on the metaphoric and metonymic poles of discourse, see Roman Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance," in R. Jakobson and M. Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, The Hague, 1956, pp. 67-96.

27. See 1963 essay by Milton Brown reprinted in *Paul Strand: A Retrospective Monograph, The Years 1915-1968*, Millerton, 1971, p. 370.

ditions of a kind of binary folklore. That is, there is a "symbolist" folk-myth and a "realist" folk-myth. The misleading but popular form of this opposition is "art photography" vs. "documentary photography." Every photograph tends, at any given moment of reading in any given context, toward one of these two poles of meaning. The oppositions between these two poles are as follows: photographer as seer vs. photographer as witness, photography as expression vs. photography as reportage, theories of imagination (and inner truth) vs. theories of empirical truth, affective value vs. informative value, and finally, metaphoric signification vs. metonymic signification.²⁶

It would be a mistake to identify liberal and "concerned" documentary entirely with realism. As we have seen in the case of Hine, even the most deadpan reporter's career is embroiled in an expressionist structure. From Hine to W. Eugene Smith stretches a continuous tradition of expressionism in the realm of "fact." All photography that even approaches the status of high art contains the mystical possibility of genius. The representation drops away and only the valorized figure of the artist remains. The passage of the photograph from report to metaphor (and of photographer from reporter to genius) in the service of liberalism is celebrated in one of the more bizarre pieces on photography ever written. This is the enemy:

[Strand] believes in human values, in social ideals, in decency and in truth. These are not clichés to him. That is why his people, whether Bowery derelict, Mexican peon, New England farmer, Italian peasant, French artisan, Breton or Hebrides fisherman, Egyptian fellahin, the village idiot, or the great Picasso, are all touched by the same heroic quality — humanity. To a great extent this is a reflection of Strand's personal sympathy and respect for his subjects. But it is just as much the result for his acuteness of perception which finds in the person a core of human virtue and his unerring sense of photographic values that transmits that quality to us. It is all part of an artistic process in which the conception of form, the just balance of mass and space and pattern to frame, the richness of texture and detail transform a moment of intuition into an immutable monument.²⁷

The celebration of abstract humanity becomes, in any given political situation, the celebration of the dignity of the passive victim. This is the final outcome of the appropriation of the photographic image for liberal political ends; the oppressed are granted a bogus Subjecthood when such status can be secured only from within, on their own terms.

Paparazzo Notes

See Jackie Run.
See Ron Jockey.

For the most part, the photojournalist is an anonymous function, a mere agent in a corporate representational enterprise. Our conviction that the news is fact depends on the seamless and transparent character of the medium, on the illusion that we are contemplating the product of an unbiased and uniform professionalism. Recently, however, a space has been cleared in the information industry for a kind of ritual celebration of the “creativity” of the photojournalist. Just as the television newscaster has evolved from an authoritative institutional voice into a mannered pseudo-independent performer, the photojournalist is being represented as the mythic embodiment of the humanism and daring of the bourgeois news media. And perhaps because it is celebrated as such, reporting itself becomes an increasingly mannerist endeavour. Producing an artist figure in this context can be likened to pulling a rabbit out of a top hat. In its initial incarnation, the news photograph is an anonymously rendered topical report, anchored to a specific moment and place in history. Resurrected as high art, the photo is a highly valued moment in a Career. In the first instance, the representation appears to be unmediated by individual consciousness; in the second, the world is filtered through a persona, mediated by an exemplary witness. Thus, the same photograph is invested with covert autobiographical significance. Artistic “success” for the photojournalist could be said, somewhat facetiously, to involve having one’s work consistently read as self-portraiture.

Ron Galella was a hack photographer until adversity provided him with both the need and the opportunity to invent himself as a celebrity. His book *Jacqueline* (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1974), far from being a romantic offering to Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, is in fact a piece of aggressive self-justification. Galella’s individual

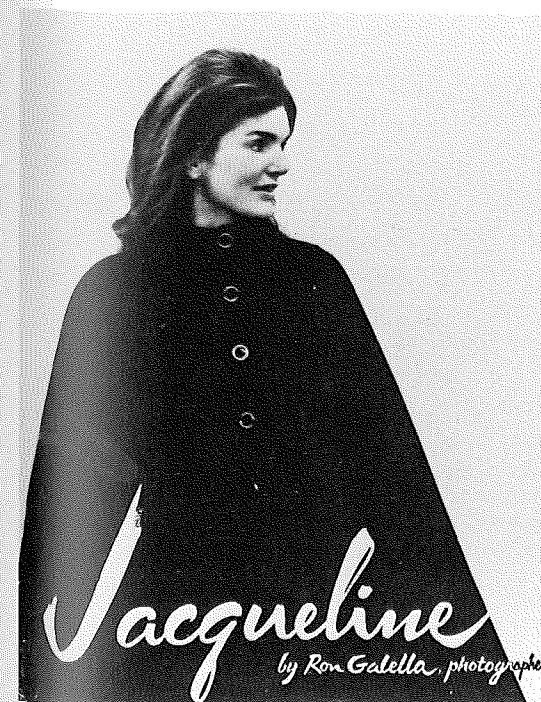


Figure 1: Cover of Ron Galella’s *Jacqueline*, 1974.

photographs, in themselves, are hardly the issue; they are sloppy, unremarkable images, with the grainy, unfocused look of the combat photograph or the police surveillance snapshot. At times, Galella photographs Jacqueline as though she were a fugitive heiress, caught in the act by an automatic holdup camera. Most of the images are clichéd. An occasional photograph stands out, suggesting a quirky low-level scandal: Aristotle Onassis glowers into the camera, his outstretched arm dangling a two dollar tip in front of a quizzical looking chauffeur. A Greek painter named Skalido poses with a horrendous driftwood painting, "similar to one bought by Jackie for her New York apartment." But I am suggesting that we regard these photographs as elements within larger conceptual images, images of social relations. Galella's photographs, both in the fan magazines and in *Jacqueline*, are implicated in the construction of public myth. The question here is one of theatricalized social role, of a sustained social interaction between Galella, as photographer, and Jacqueline, as celebrity. But Galella fills the role of photographer in a loose and nervous way; he is given to garrulous self-justification, as though he felt incapable of standing on his work alone. Galella's personal art is fundamentally narrative, and every one of his photographs is subordinated to the logic of literary invention. He can be thought of as a naive conceptual artist, as an autobiographical photonovelist of sorts. His narrative, both cunning and filled with self-mystification, speaks of a need to explain himself to a skeptical audience. Galella is unsure of his place in history.

Galella's compulsion to legitimize himself publicly is understandable only if we consider the politics of his career. Working as a freelance photographer and selling the bulk of one's pictures to magazines like *Photoplay* and *Modern Screen* is probably a bit like owning a fast-food franchise: the terms of production are dictated from above, undermining any illusion of real economic or esthetic autonomy. (Both the hamburger and the scandal industries understand and exploit the symbolic value of the cliché.) The photographer, in this context, provides an "open" photograph that is used in a rather vague and sloppy way to validate any one of a multitude of rumors. The documentary function of the image is often so imprecisely defined that the same photograph could be used to corroborate contradictory propositions. At random, I pulled a copy of *Photoplay*, March 1972, out of a pile in a Chelsea used-magazine store catering to film fetishists. The cover story promotes another sordid domestic crisis, more ruling class dirt:

SERVANT TALKS!

THE NIGHT ARI WARNED JACKIE: "I'M LEAVING YOU!"

HOW SHE GOT HIM TO TAKE HER BACK.

I recognize most of the photos accompanying the article as Galella's. No credits are given. The text is typical fan-magazine stuff. Jacqueline, too much the haughty and withdrawn princess, is aban-

doned by Aristotle, whose peasant soul craves a more lively companion. After a period of isolation, Jacqueline mends her ways and is reunited with Aristotle. They party together in public.

The Jacqueline legend occupies a unique space in the pop culture pantheon. Her public image is in fact a superimposition of images: glamorous haute bourgeoisie, one of the Beautiful People, and tragic widow of a secular martyr. At any given journalistic moment, she may be marked as but one of the exemplary creatures within this manifold: as wife, as mother, as consumer, as face and body, as self-decorator, as widow, as lover, as patroness, as sports-woman, and so on. The all-encompassing logic is that of sex-role, a logic to which even her privilege is subject. Jacqueline is a "positive" female archetype; her failures are instructive. The fan magazine steers this persona through a variety of fictional crises, aiming at the melodramatic resolution of sex-political contradictions, all at the level of fantasy. In this imaginary *Photoplay* world, Jacqueline shares the "fate" of all women; her life is invested with a country-music pathos. An ideological bludgeon wielded at an audience of lower-class women, the fan magazine upholds the virtues of feminine passivity and submission, offering its readers covert instruction in the mechanics of living gracefully with male violence.

But rather than generalize, I'd like to take a closer look at the article mentioned above, in order to suggest how Galella's photos function as "news" within the fan magazine. Facing the title page with its blaring announcement of near-divorce are two rather trivial looking color photos in sequence, almost certainly taken only seconds apart. We see Jacqueline from the same camera position in both frames, in flashlit medium shots. The camera was close enough to record gesture and facial expression and far enough away to provide some sense of place. Jacqueline is standing at a bar, framed in such a way that she appears to be alone. She is oblivious to the two persons behind her on the right; they, in turn, ignore her. And if anyone stands outside the frame on her left, she gives no sign, in these two instants, of acknowledging an unseen companion. She is wearing a Little Lord Fauntleroy costume. Her hair is somewhat disheveled.

In the first of the two photographs, Jacqueline reaches for a drink, her right hand about to grasp the half-empty glass. Her glance is directed downward, as though she might be watching her hand as it closed around the drink. On the other hand, her eyes could be scanning the printed page of a magazine that lies on the bar, an inch or two away from the object of her grasp. But suppose we imagine that this "downward glance" is in fact an "inward glance," suggesting introspection, withdrawal in a public space. Suppose we imagine that the "downward glance" is in fact a case of "heavy lidded eyes," suggesting intoxication, and deliberate over-attention to the act of steering the hand toward an ill-defined, unfocused target. The glint of the flash on Jacqueline's makeup gives her face a taut and pallid look. Her features are either strained

or slack, it's impossible to tell. She looks depressed. She looks drunk. She's both. She's reading a magazine and offhandedly reaching for a drink, bathed for an instant in the unflattering light of the strobe.

The second photograph catches Jacqueline in an animated stance. She smiles and leans forward; her eyes, dilated and glistening in the strobelight, are wide with a look of eagerness or exuberance. A slight underexposure relative to the preceding frame has driven the pallor from her cheeks. Her drink is no emptier than it was. Her right hand, no longer grasping for the glass, rests on the bar in front of her in an indeterminately expressive gesture. Clearly, Jacqueline's energies are directed outward, toward someone on the other side of the bar, outside the frame. Our only clue to the identity of this person is a man's right forearm and hand, clothed in a garish yellow sleeve with a black cuff, holding a swizzle stick. She's talking to the bartender.

Something is offered here beyond the spectacle of invaded celebrity privacy, beyond the cheap thrills of a false intimacy. At this "higher" level of meaning the photographs carry a transcendental significance, having been cut loose from the banalities of moment and place. The *Photoplay* reader is expected to fixate on these images not as documents of real events but as embodiments of a moral lesson. The photographs function covertly as iconic validations of a written testimonial in a manner stylistically marked as that of documentary. That is, the photographs by their look of innocence and candor confer upon the text an illusory truthfulness. At the same time, the paired snapshots concretize the alleged transformation of Jacqueline's personality. The accompanying text begins:

If it weren't so obvious and well documented, the stunning transformation of Jackie Onassis from a cold, haughty, withdrawn and unbappy woman into an outgoing, gutsy, adventurous, high-spirited creature, would be absolutely incredible.

Taken literally, with this statement as a pointer, the photographs become the conclusive documentation of a psychic reversal, a documentation achieved by a kind of "before and after" bracketing. Here is the psychic equivalent of the weight-loss miracle. (After all, the fan magazine is a re-engineering manual for female mind and body.) We are to believe that, within the span of a few seconds in a public bar, this celebrated woman reinvented herself in the face of her husband's threats and a photographer's flash. The decisive moment took place invisibly between the two exposures.

Even after suspending, out of charity, our insistence on the documentary integrity of these images, a nonspecific *reference* to a major shift in persona remains. Even this reading depends, of course, on our taking fleeting expression and gesture as weighty emblems of interior life. Thus, in the first photo Jacqueline broods, drink in hand. In the second, she embraces the world. (We ignore the fact that, of all the people she might be seen talking to, she's

been caught with the bartender.) In this moral tale, vivacity triumphs over brooding self-indulgence. Stripped of its specificity, *Photoplay's* naive diptych functions allegorically in much the same way that O. G. Rejlander's composite photograph *The Two Ways of Life* (1857) did, although the latter work presents a Victorian, bourgeois, and male-oriented dilemma, while the Jacqueline photos present a moral opposition that is modern, lower class, and directed at women. Here, virtue is associated with an ebullient but submissive glamour, and vice, or deviance, with the terrors of a lonely housewife's alcoholism.

But where does the photographer stand in all this? Behind the bar, having slipped a bill into the same bartender's hand? Surely we've been looking at an editor's art, and not Galella's. More evidence of editorial liberties: the same article includes another photograph that also appears in *Jacqueline*. *Photoplay* decided to run this shot of Jacqueline and Peter Duchin leaving a restaurant with Duchin cropped out of the frame. The headline over this alteration declares, "Days and Nights Alone." This sort of thing is typical in fan-magazine photo fictions, but a more curious omission stands out: Galella's are the only photographs to appear in this particular issue of *Photoplay* without credit. At the same time the article on Jacqueline mentions him obliquely:

Would you have believed . . . that the same Jackie would suddenly stop running and biding from a photographer who dogged her steps, turn on him and file suit against him in open court?

Galella is allowed to figure incidentally, and in a negative way, in a narrative that depends on his doggedly obtained "evidence." This issue of *Photoplay* appeared during the Onassis-Galella lawsuit hearings. The magazine's editor, Bernadette Carrozza, testified against Galella while continuing to run his photographs. Galella, understandably, felt betrayed. In his book, he aims a James McCordesque diatribe at Carrozza and Shana Alexander, the former editor of *McCall's*, who referred to the photographer as a "piranha" on national radio and television. In this context, Galella sees himself being cast as the nameless functionary, left out in the cold by clean-faced superiors. He displays the economic and political resentment of the little man in the middle, the resentment of the shopkeeper, the cop, and the lower-level bureaucrat:

So, if I'm a piranha fish, like Shana Alexander says, what are the people at McCall's — sharks? They made a lot more money out of Jackie than I ever did . . . It's okay to knock a paparazzo . . . but don't knock any of the big fish in publishing. You might hurt your pretty reputation in the business and find yourself blackballed some day.

Galella is acutely aware of his own struggle for economic survival, and this consciousness informs every attempt he makes to narrate his own life. Consider, by way of contrast, a passing remark by photographer Irving Penn in his just released *Worlds in a Small*

Room: "... our guide and advisor, would fulfill the social requirements of such a visit [to a New Guinea village], and arrange the payments that had to be made." This is Penn's only reference to the complex barter transactions that must have taken place between his party and the native peoples encountered on a *Vogue* portrait safari. Penn has the economic freedom and the discretion as an artist not to worry about or mention money. Galella, on the other hand, cannot escape the specter of the commodity; every image is previsualized in terms of its saleability. He releases the shutter with the compulsive impatience of the slot machine artist. A photograph of Aristotle Onassis smoking a cigar translates into a cash prize from the Cigar Institute of America. Or, like a fashion-world bounty hunter, Galella waits for Jacqueline to appear in hot pants, banking on a reward from *Women's Wear Daily*. He permutes couples with an eye toward the gossip potential of the suggested unions.

Galella's narrative yields an almost perfect example of the esthetic and economic predicament of the commercial artist and journalist. His self-justifications continually shift between two contradictory poles. One self-image is pragmatic: he's just trying to make a buck in a hostile world. The other is idealized: he's an artist, a born romantic, and a champion of the free press. In recounting his Bronx childhood, Galella distinguishes himself from other working-class sons of Italian immigrant parents:

But I was different from the others. I had a lot of imagination, and from the time I was very young my heroes were the great romantic stars of fiction, like D'Artagnan of The Three Musketeers and Don Quixote and Cyrano de Bergerac. I was artistic. I think most people don't use the creative talents they have . . . they would rather watch television.

More often than not, Galella's ideal is the vindicated loser, the impulsive and foolish seeming fellow who triumphs over the scorn of others. But even in idealizing himself in terms of literary models, Galella cannot relinquish the vocabulary of the fan magazine, equating "star" and "hero." He feels compelled to document his early career as an artist; *Jacqueline* includes a reproduction of a mess-hall mural he painted while serving in the Air Force and photographs of ceramic statues of his literary heroes. But it is impossible to tell whether this is droll self-mockery or naive self-promotion, although it is probably the latter. After all, Galella may imagine, without thinking about it too much, that the same people who read fan magazines are reading *Jacqueline*. Presenting himself to an imaginary audience of fans, people of his own social background, Galella need not feel at all distanced from his own life. For these readers, he allows himself to play Horatio Alger, proclaiming, for example, that "energy plus ideas equals success."

Beneath all his rhetoric, Galella aspires to professional and esthetic legitimacy. He reverses the derogatory connotation of the label "paparazzo," reinventing Fellini's neologism in ideal terms. Against a United States District Judge's official definition of papa-

razzi as "a kind of annoying insect . . . [who] make themselves as visible to the public and obnoxious to their subjects as possible to aid in the advertisement and wide sale of their works," Galella poses the theory of the higher truth of the stolen image. This theory is implicit in the title "candid photography" and hinges on a fundamental distinction between nature and artifice, between the "real" and the assumed persona. The unguarded — and therefore less consciously theatrical — moment is thought to manifest more of the "inner being" of the subject than is the calculated gestalt of immobilized gesture, expression, and stance. This is the fantasy of the totally transparent medium, of a documentary art liberated from the indeterminacy principle. The advice columns of popular photography magazines offer this formula endlessly, usually as a curative for the stilted look of the posed family snapshot. But with Galella the antagonism between nature and culture takes on political overtones. The image of a celebrity is an institutional edifice, maintained and protected by armies of press agents, makeup artists, and bodyguards. The paparazzo's task is to penetrate that wall. He sees himself ideally as the antagonist and ethical better of the official portrait photographer, the court artist whose function is validation and promotion and whose life is, as a result, supposedly more comfortable than that of the freelancer.

Here we have to distinguish between two varieties of *spectacle*, one official and operatic, the other illicit and tending toward the pornographic. The Academy Awards, *Triumph of the Will*, and state funerals are about ostentatious public affect. Hollywood scandals, Eva Braun's home movies, and photographs of a nude Jacqueline Onassis, on the other hand, offer their audiences the voyeuristic thrill of violated upper-class privacy. (The ultimate paparazzo coup is to catch the stars fucking; but the elevation to stardom of the porn film performer accomplishes this in reverse. Galella, however, insists on self-censorship, on "tasteful" and "flattering" imagery.) The spectacle of daily life thrives on a kind of conceptual collage, in which the celebrated public figure is superimposed on the spaces of the mundane world, as in the photos of Jacqueline drinking. Galella presses his lens against a drugstore window in Peapack, New Jersey, catching Jacqueline "buying magazines and ice cream with real money, just like an ordinary American woman." But, it's rather foolish to argue that the fragment of the everyday yields a higher truth than does the controlled representation of upper-class glamour and privilege. Both images are biased by the framing discourse to deliver messages that are ideological, rather than ideally "true" or "false." Furthermore, even casual street behavior is theatrical, particularly so with celebrities, who expect to be assaulted by photographers at any moment. Jacqueline testified in court that she manufactured a "Galella smile." So much for candor.

The two most notable "candid" photographers are Erich Salomon and Weegee. Galella, without being terribly conscious of photographic history, owes something to both. He cannot help but

derive his subject matter and his overall strategy from Salomon, who was the first photographer to engage in the systematic and unsolicited portrayal of the famous and powerful. But unlike Galella's, Salomon's career during the late 20s and 30s was a triumph of discretion and camouflage. He would stroll into European political banquets and receptions in white tie and tails and stand some distance from his concealed camera, releasing the shutter at the appropriate moment with a cable. An outsider of inferior social status, Salomon assumed the manner and style of his subjects. Weegee, on the other hand, had no assimilation problems during the journalistic period of his career. He was a low life among the lowly; his sensibilities are those of the lumpen hustler, the ambulance chaser, the aggressive practitioner who sticks to the streets. Working within his own milieu, Weegee was able to produce interesting and very quirky images of lower-class urban life. But as soon as he achieved some recognition from the Museum of Modern Art, he went slightly haywire, replacing his lens with a kaleidoscope and embarking on a cornball abstractionist path. (At the same time, he published a dedicatory photo of Edward Steichen with spittle running into his beard.) Galella shares Weegee's aggressive tactics and his reactionary lower-class vision, but not his capacity for slander and self-mockery. Involved in a more spectacular and less legitimate journalism than Salomon's, both these photographers have a taste for cheap theatrics and self-promotion. Perhaps Galella's major talent lies in his systematic self-documentation. He photographs himself lurking in the bushes on Skorpios or tosses an extra camera to a companion while hustling down Fifth Avenue after Jacqueline. These photographs are the most revealing in the book; they offer the strongest clues to the photographer's interactive style and public self-image. Galella attempts to situate himself *within* the spectacle, as a sort of luminous jet-set detective. *Jacqueline* is full of tips on the covert tactics of paparazzo photography: whom to trust, whom not to trust, whom to bribe, how to get cheap information out of Greek fishermen — in general, how to manoeuvre one's way around the social barriers that stand between the rich and powerful and the uninvited cameras of the popular press. Galella promotes himself as a trespass artist. His photographs are marked, above all, as the outcomes of specific encounters; only a few images aspire to a transcendental glamour.

Here is the crux of the matter. For Galella, photojournalism is war, rooted in the social inequality of photographer and subject. And yet he both affirms and denies the social antagonism between himself and the stars. Both his affirmation and his denial have personal and ideal components. With Jacqueline he allows his war to masquerade as romance, somewhat half-heartedly assuming the stance of the jilted but devoted admirer. Galella is a failed infiltrator; his attempts at camouflage are so transparent that one suspects he prefers confrontation to being passed unrecognized:

A paparazzo needs a car. A couple of years ago I bought a \$3,600 carousel-red Pontiac Firebird with spoke wheels and stereo am/fm radio. You don't need a car as nice as that but it helps me look as though I belong. You fit right into the best parking lots with a car like that. The Secret Servicemen couldn't believe it the first time they saw me drive up in that car.

Somehow, ostentatious upward mobility and subterfuge get confused. Galella's resentment is tempered by envy and respect; he aspires to stardom himself. He continually compares his own social options to those of Jacqueline: she is protected by doormen in Manhattan, while he moves to Yonkers to avoid burglars; she parties, while he waits outside in the cold. Jacqueline publicly demeans him, testifying in court that he always "grunted" while photographing her. Accordingly, Galella's narrative shifts between self-confident testimonials to his victory over an unprivileged background, and attempts to refute the charge that he lacks the manners and refinement appropriate to upper-class life. He is simultaneously aware and unaware of class boundaries.

Galella and his lawyers portray the Onassis court battle as an epic confrontation between the "individual's right to privacy and the public's right to be informed." In a sense, the trial recapitulates the historical antagonism between the liberal and the popular press and the sequestered economic elite. Here, Galella casts himself as the liberal defender of the little man. In one breath he accuses the Kennedy-appointed judge of prejudicial bias and Onassis of buying witnesses. With the next, his faith in democracy is restored:

... I was flattered by the fact that here I was with Jackie as an equal for a change. I was a nobody and yet under the American system, I could bring this great woman into court, where she had to defend herself, just like any other citizen. And you know, it was the first time, the only time that Jackie ever referred to me as Mr. Galella.

Jacqueline was undoubtedly written in order to pay Galella's court costs.

The last photograph in the book is a masterpiece of self-vindication. In the background, Galella lounges under the awning of La Côte Basque, legs crossed, hands in pockets, looking very dapper and nonchalant in a plaid jacket and striped tie. His camera and flash hang unused around his neck. Jacqueline, Aristotle, and another woman stand in the foreground, apparently waiting for a limousine. Another photographer, almost invisible in shadow, lurks directly behind Aristotle. All that can be discerned of the photographer in any detail is his hand on the shutter of his camera. Galella's caption reads, "I don't photograph Jackie anymore. I leave that now to other paparazzi."

We tend to forget that the making of a human likeness on film is a political act. Galella may be an opportunist and a hustler, and he may take his fame any way he can get it. But his one virtue as an artist lies in the fact that what is hidden in most photographer's work, the transaction that brought the image into the world, is painfully obvious in his.



I don't photograph Jackie anymore. I leave that now to other paparazzi.

Figure 2: Final page from *Jacqueline*. Photograph by Sasa Wargacki.



AERIAL BOMBS DROPPING ON MONTMÉDY

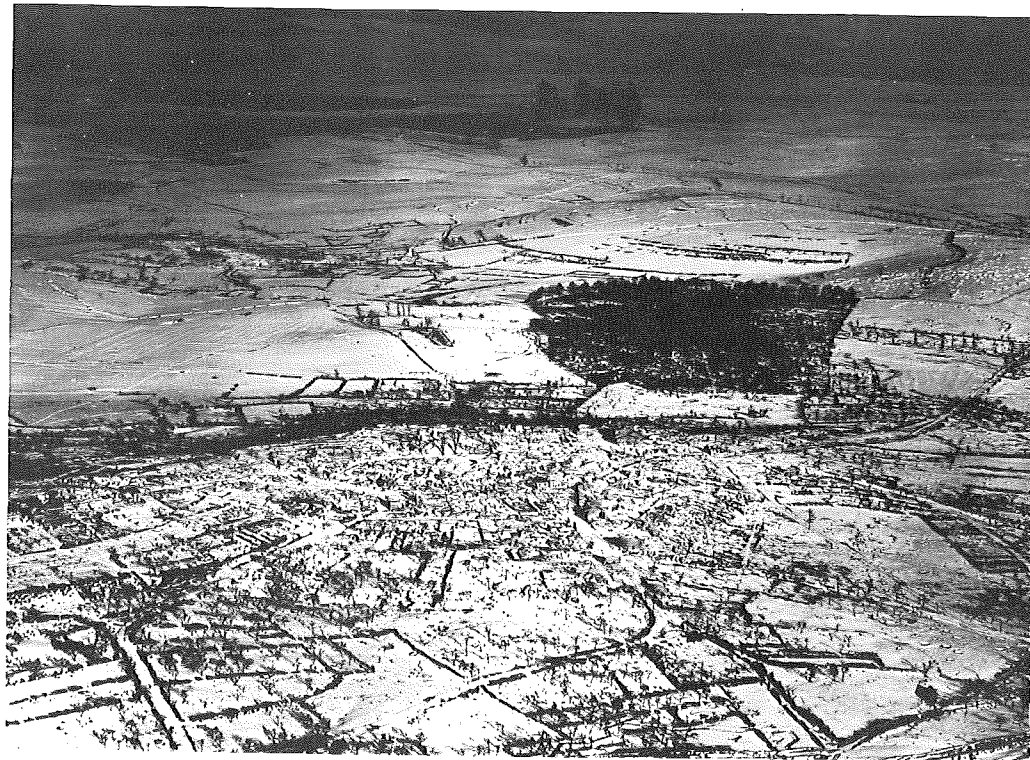


Figure 1: Aerial bombs dropping on Montmédy, 1918. Photographer unknown, Photographic Section, U.S. Air Service, American Expeditionary Force.

Figure 2: Montfaucon, Winter 1918. Photographer unknown, Photographic Section, A.E.F.

The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War

I

We can begin with the artifacts, or rather, their approximation. For several months now, an envelope full of copies of aerial reconnaissance photographs has been propped up against a concrete block of my bookshelf. They are examples of what might be termed a genre of “applied photography.” In three successive frames a farmhouse, viewed from directly above, is reduced to something less substantial than rubble. A landscape is partially obscured by clouds, smoke, and the out-of-focus strut of an airplane wing. In another picture, bombs hover in the foreground above an equally indistinct terrain. The shadow of a biplane is fixed against the outer wall of a chateau. A low sun illuminates one side of snow filled craters; a ruined town is barely discernible among the drifts and shadows. And so on.

But literary descriptions of these photographs fail to explain how their meaning relates to the ways they have been used, or how meaning and use have shifted together over time. To what discourse, or discourses, can these nearly mute pictures be attached?

Certainly “artifact” is a vague enough label for these things. Are they records, tools, artworks, decorations, commodities, relics? It is true that the “originals” of these photos manifest a kind of archeological presence. Detritus of a recent past, they are nevertheless remote; what they reveal first is their datedness. But in calling them artifacts I grant myself a certain critical distance from a culture that is still my own, from a variety of everyday production that continues in the present and thus appears as a moment of the “natural.” To regard an object as an artifact is to reinvent it, to superimpose a new meaning on the past, and therefore to obscure or mutate all earlier senses of the object. This reappropriation can be critically acknowledged or implicitly denied, in the latter case

the object is fetishized, cut loose from its origins. But consider a more or less specific and quasi-archeological sense of the word "artifact;" the range of its meaning hinges on a polarization of "tool" and "artwork," of the functional and the esthetic. A few aerial photographs are now suspended between the extremes of these categories, and somehow we are led to expect a miraculous unification of opposites. For in addition to their "obvious" original function, these particular pictures have come in a particular way to represent elevated moments of authorship. We are confronted with the seemingly fortuitous intersection of an artist's life and an aggressive, globalizing technology, that of air war.

The basic facts are these: Edward Steichen commanded the aerial photographic operations of the American Expeditionary Force in France during the First World War. A few of the 1,300,000 prints produced ended up in his personal collection after the war. A number of these photos are being exhibited and sold as products of Steichen's authorship. This event is too symptomatic of certain contradictions underlying the institutionalized myth of photography to be ignored. A look at this rather minor appropriation might lead to an understanding of the inconsistencies in the "public image" of the medium.

The problem then is to account for a range of possible readings of these pictures, to identify the covert conditions of several "conversations" or "monologues" within which these photographs achieve significance.

II

The First World War was the first occasion for the intensive use of aerial photography for "intelligence" purposes. The previous half-century had yielded combinations of balloons and draftsmen, balloons and cameras, rockets and cameras, and, absurdly enough, pigeons and cameras. With airplane photography, however, two globalizing mediums, one of transportation and the other of communication, were united in the increasingly rationalized practice of warfare. (I use "globalizing" not in the affirmative, communal sense of Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller, but in the sense of hegemony. While the airplane lent itself to material penetration and control, the camera served mainly in a cultural and ideological campaign. Godard's *Les Carabiniers* points well to this communion of the dive bomber and the postcard.) A third medium of destruction, long-range artillery, was quickly added to this instrumental collage, making possible bombardment — as well as image recording — at a great distance.

Simply put, the problem was to decide what was there and to act on that decision before "whatever it was" moved. If the entity in question fell with the category of "enemy," its destruction by artillery fire, or by other means, was ordered. The value of aerial photographs, as cues for military action, depended on their ability to testify to a *present* state of affairs. The photographic sense of

1. Roland Barthes, "Rhétorique de l'image," *Communications*, No. 4, p. 47.

2. Beaumont Newhall, *Airborne Camera*, New York, 1969, p. 27.

"having been there," identified by Roland Barthes,¹ must submit to the demands of "being there." The dream of "instantaneous" recording, transmission, and repressive response, the premonition of video surveillance, emerges from this necessity. It should be noted in passing that this quest for instantaneity was evident in the earliest stages of aerial reconnaissance. Beaumont Newhall reports that, during the American Civil War, a Union balloon observer named Lowe "devised what he called an 'aerial telegraph,' which operated by electric current supplied by wires in the cables of the balloon. Lowe reported his observations by reference to a gridded map, a duplicate of which was on the ground. On at least one occasion, a scaled and annotated drawing of enemy terrain was made."² But clearly a certain "lag time" became increasingly allowable with the development of destructive weapons which could obliterate the entire terrain in which movement *might* have occurred. Strategic bombing, as it was practiced in Southeast Asia, seemed to have transcended the need for refinements in reconnaissance techniques; after all, the enemy was everywhere.

But I have digressed from the fundamental *tactical* concerns which governed the reading of aerial reconnaissance photographs. The meaning of a photograph consisted of whatever it yielded to a rationalized act of "interpretation." As sources of military intelligence, these pictures carried an almost wholly denotative significance. Few photographs, except perhaps medical ones, were as apparently free from "higher" meaning in their common usage. They seem to have been devoid of any rhetorical structure. But this poverty of meaning was conditional rather than immanent. Within the context of intelligence operations the only "rational" questions were those that addressed the photograph at the indexical level, such as: "Is that a machine gun or a stump?" In other words, the act of interpretation demanded that the photograph be treated as an ensemble of "univalent," or indexical, signs, signs that could only carry one meaning, that could point to only one object. Efficiency demanded this illusory certainty. Thus codes were developed for translating an ambiguous two-dimensional image into an unequivocal knowledge of its three-dimensional referent and back again into conventionalized and unambiguous two-dimensional signs on a drawn map. A triangle stood for a dump; a circle with a central dot stood for a trench mortar. A terrain was reduced to a set of coded topographic features, "grounded" by the digital logic of the grid. With the development of camouflage, a low-level language game evolved in which the indexical status of the sign was thrown into question, thereby inflating the suspicions of the photo-interpreter.

In the pursuit of truth, attempts were also made to eliminate, or systematically discount, the deformations of the medium. The compression of a topologically varied surface into a single-plane image led to obvious confusions between depression and elevation. To eliminate this problem, vertical photographs were taken during

hours of oblique sunlight, in order that the location of shadows might distinguish convexity from concavity. In addition, stereoscopic cameras were adopted. The quest for transparency led to the use of large photographic plates to minimize the effect of grain. Cameras were mounted on springs to reduce the blurring that resulted from airframe vibration; high speed shutters were developed to eliminate the distortions caused by the coincidence of airplane and shutter movement. More examples could be given. As the technology of military reconnaissance developed, attempts were made to "recover" already degraded images. Today the Central Intelligence Agency funds research into "image restoration," a body of techniques by which a motion-blurred or unfocused image can be computer processed to obtain a picture of improved quality. With this the search for truth transcends the limitations of the medium.

Airplane photography was rapidly put to strategic use during the First World War. Aerial photographs were expected to provide enough coverage, detail, and evidence of systematic change to permit the construction of a valid theory of enemy strategy. Composite photographs of an entire front were pasted together out of individual frames and regularly amended. At this upper level of the military hierarchy, the reading of the photographs became entangled in a shifting and equivocal narrative entitled "what the enemy is doing." Rationalization pushed the whole endeavor in the direction of intensive global coverage, toward the achievement of a "scientific" predictive capability (to use the jargon of its creators). Aerial photography can be seen as the triumph of applied realism.

But what of the relations which governed the original meaning of these aerial photographs? Can any discourse but a mechanized one be located in this? The systematic investigation of a landscape for traces of an enemy, coupled with the destruction of that enemy was surely a mechanical process. Here, information was not so much exchanged as *directed*; meaning, severely constrained, was a means to an immediate material end. "Reading," as it was ideally defined, consisted of a mechanical coding of the image. The logic of human language is less evident than the logic of the factory.

The making of these reconnaissance prints was one of the first instances of virtual assembly-line image production. (Henry Ford's first automobile assembly-line became operative only in 1914.) The establishment of this method of production grew out of demands for resolution, volume, and immediacy. No method of reproduction but direct printing from the original negative would hold the detail necessary for reconnaissance purposes. Large numbers of prints from a single negative had to be made for distribution throughout the hierarchy of command. In addition, the information in prints dated very rapidly. Under these circumstances, efficiency depended on a thoroughgoing division of labor and a virtually continuous speedup of the work process. Printers worked in unventilated makeshift darkrooms; 20 workers might produce as

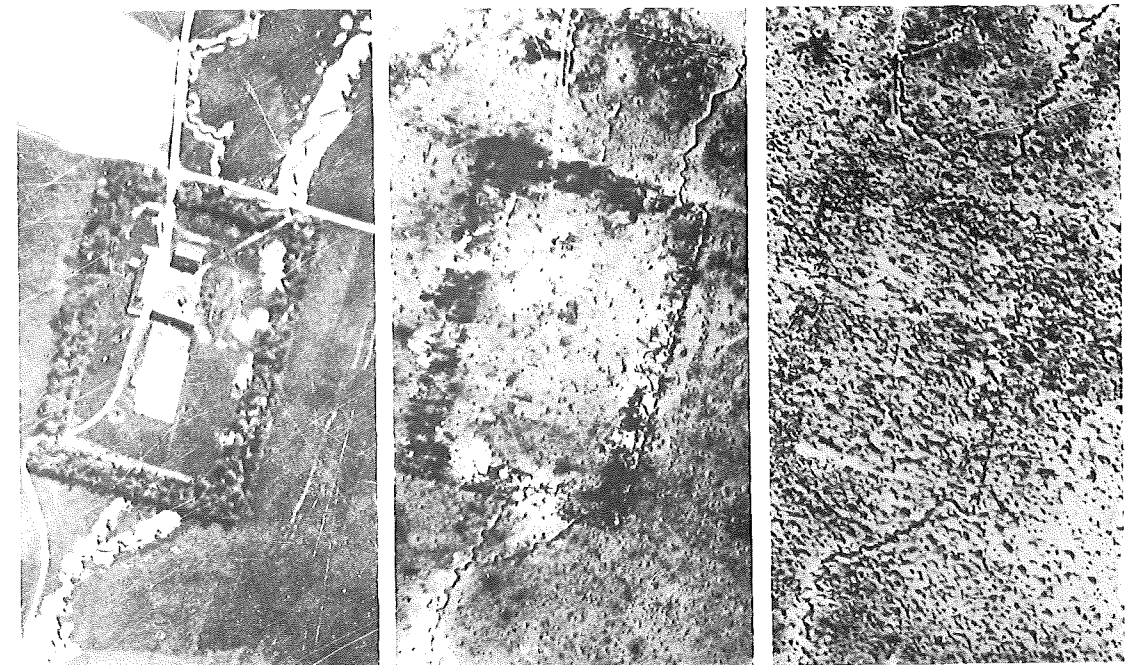
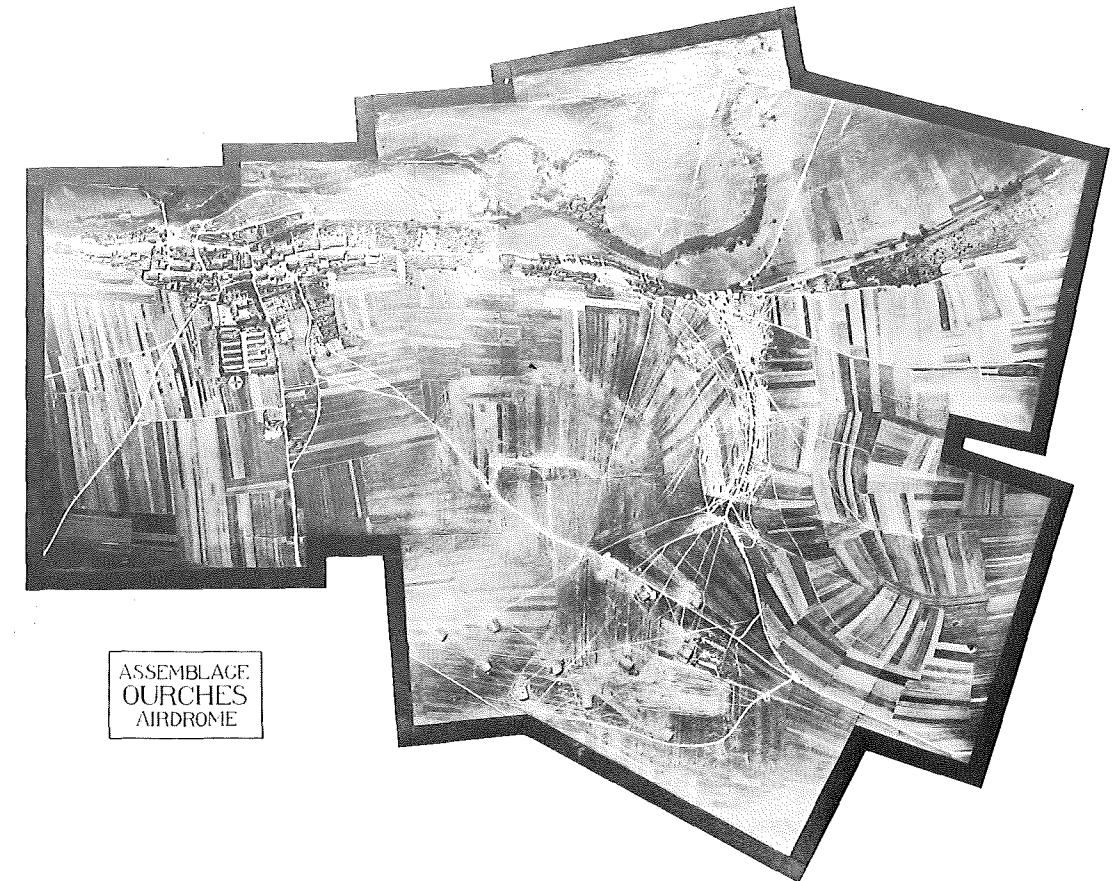
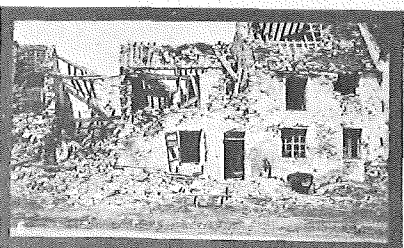
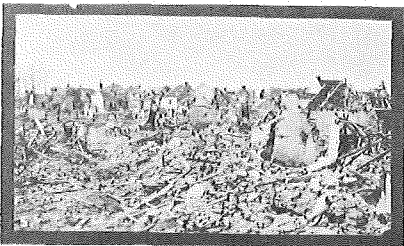
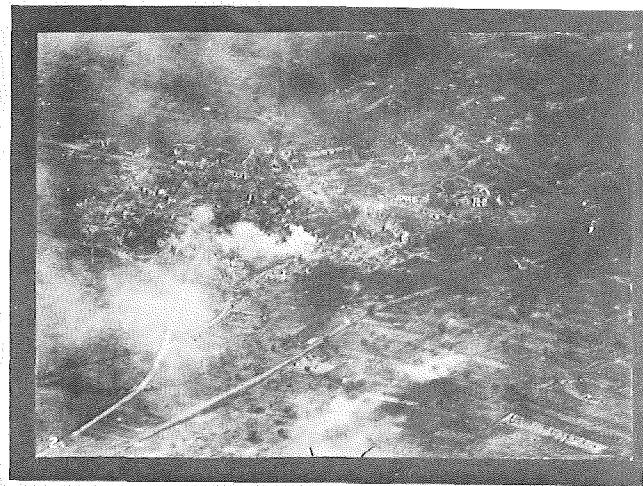
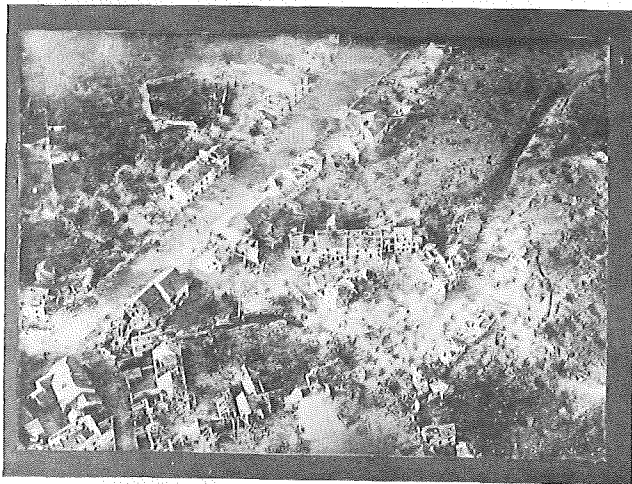


Figure 3: *Assemblage: Ourches Airdrome*, c. 1918. Photographer unknown, Royal Air Force.

Figure 4: Progressive destruction by artillery fire of a farm occupied and fortified by the Germans, c. 1918. Photographers unknown, Photographic Section, A.E.F.

3. An anecdotal history of these operations is given in Edward Steichen, "American Aerial Photography at the Front," *U.S. Air Service*, Vol. 1, No. 5, June 1919, pp. 33-39. *U.S. Air Service* was to become an important forum for the developing military and civilian aeronautics industry during the 1920s and 30s. Steichen's article was reprinted with different illustrations in *The Camera*, Vol. 23, July 1919, pp. 359-366. The readers of this journal were mostly amateur pictorialist photographers.



VAUX

1- JUNE, 30. BEFORE LAST ATTACK BY AMERICAN TROOPS.
Infantry ponds showing in upper right slope.

2- JULY, 1. DURING BATTLE.
American troops entering village visible left end of main street. Enemy dead in center.

3- JULY, 1. VICTORY.
Roads repaired.

4- JULY, 18. AFTER FINAL RETREAT.

5-6-7-8-9. GROUND VIEWS OF RUINS.

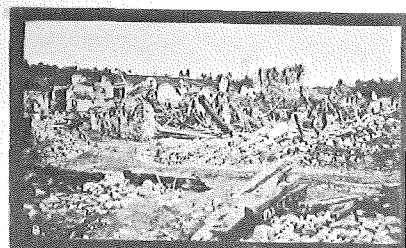


Figure 5: Nine Views of Vaux (Château-Thierry sector), showing stages of American attack and capture of village, June 30-July 18, 1918. Photographers unknown, Photographic Section, A.E.F. (N.B. In 1976, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, acquired this anonymous assemblage and the photograph reproduced as Figure 9 below. The museum has catalogued both with the attribution, "School of Edward Steichen.")

many as 1,500 prints in an hour, working 16-hour shifts.³

Edward Steichen commanded 55 officers and 1,111 enlisted men. Obviously he was not a combat photographer, although he did go for rides over the front lines with Billy Mitchell on occasion. Steichen's job was that of a middle-to-high-level military bureaucrat. He organized production, attended Rodin's funeral, and is said to have been especially good at solving procurement problems because of his intimacy with France.

III

After the war, reconnaissance photographs ended up in scrap heaps, in military archives, in personal collections of war memorabilia, in institutional collections of military and technological artifacts, and so on. Aside from the scrap heaps, each of these could be thought of as a discourse situation in which the photograph takes on a certain synecdochal or metonymic significance, standing for some larger and inclusive or contextually related object or event. The photograph becomes a truth-conferring relic in a range of narratives, some of which possess an institutional authority and some of which carry only the authority of anecdotally rendered personal experience. Anything from the opinions of experts, the history of a battle, the history of photographic techniques, the history of flight, dissertations on the role of air power in the First World War, to digressions on the French countryside and tales from the trenches might be expected. The fact that these are photographs is, in a sense, trivial; their artifactual presence is such that they share a generic space with old uniforms, insignia, rebuilt airplanes, and convincing replicas of the original atom bombs. On the other hand, the folklore of photography also grants a pseudo-artifactual existence to the thing depicted. One consumes both the picture and its object, the tarnished medium and the historical instant. To the extent that the particular arena has little or nothing to do with photography in itself, the historical instant takes precedence over the medium.

Consider the military museum as the first moment in the institutional afterlife of reconnaissance photographs. The Air Force operates a museum somewhere in Colorado that is devoted to "aerospace photography." Other war museums offer the photographs as part of their displays. In such places, the repressive content of imperialist war is displaced into a theatre of objects. An ideological use replaces the earlier material utility of the artifact. The virtual narrative is such that the historical development of the means of repression and destruction appears as a temporal accretion of hardware. War ceases to project any bodily threat, instead the audience is offered the heroism of the machine and, indirectly, that of the arms manufacturer. The experience of war becomes explicable only in terms of an advancing militarist technology; both the human and political meanings of war are obscured. This spectacle is fetishistic and masculine, meaning is compressed into a seemingly auton-

omous and pseudo-human artifact, into a "battered but valiant" commodity. Warplanes were once commonly named after imaginary prostitutes.

The art gallery represents an obvious step upward, in class terms, from the pseudopopulist arena of the war museum. One could assume that Edward Steichen's personal collection of aerial photographs was elevated from the ranks of the one million by his act of selection. But this is the precious and recuperative variant of the most simple-minded Duchamp Readymade argument. It should be noted that Steichen expressed great hostility toward the "mockery and discouragement" of prewar Dada.⁴ I suppose some account should be made for the possibility that Steichen himself took the photographs; since, although this is the most trivial aspect of the critical problem, it is this claim that placed the photographs in the critical arena in the first place. The argument for Steichen's authorship cannot be disproved. However, he himself never claimed to have taken any of the photographs in question. And a certain amount of informed curatorial and art historical opinion asserts that Steichen was not the author. Even if he was, my argument would still hold. The situation from which these photographs emerged remains the same, despite the possibility that these might be artifacts of Steichen's slumming in the productive operations under his command.

The art-marketing system provides these aerial photographs with a new order of instrumentality, with a straightforward economic value that can be mobilized to secure more value. For the dealer the prints represent movable stock; for the buyer they stand for invested capital. To call attention to these meanings, which may or may not be significant in any given situation, is to risk being considered vulgar. After all, these are rather low-priced items by art-world standards. Nevertheless, the logic of the commodity constitutes a framing condition for all material transactions conducted within the market arena. So much for the obvious.

The historical development of photographs into high-class art commodities has been contingent on interpenetrating economic and esthetic conditions. In a generally depressed art-market situation, photographs by recognized artists are among the only commodities that are escalating significantly in value. One reason, of course, is that the overall economic recession has reduced buying power, creating a demand for lower-priced artworks. To the extent that photographs are newly legitimized objects of collection, value can be manipulated upward from a near-zero level. At this stage in the game a journalistic myth of primitive, undiscovered value can circulate — the fable of gold in the attic. Photographic prints potentially occupy an economic space equivalent to that of limited-edition graphics, with a significant difference that "original" photographic prints represent the "best" that the medium has to offer, while graphics are considered to be subordinate to painting. In esthetic terms, photography offers a heightened visibility to re-

4. Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, Garden City, 1963, n.p.

presentational issues, a refuge from the rumored bankruptcy (both economic and metaphysical) of abstraction, and the appeal of a seemingly autonomous discipline that is both legitimate and exotic. In the galleries, a growing critical discourse provides the reassuring background murmur of a continuous "photography-as-high-art" conversation.

My interest at this point is not so much in the overall legitimizing discourse but in a contingent and subordinate form, in what might be called a "promotional discourse." The murmur is momentarily overlaid by a note of urgency. At times, promotion may consist of an opportunistic manipulation of methods provided by the larger, more generalized discourse. Of the two "conversations," the first is materially interested, while the second supposedly manifests a benign neutrality. Their general economic interdependence should be obvious. The promoter's role is not distinct, although the most likely performers are dealers and critics. Promotion is the mediating term between authorship and connoisseurship. Promotion facilitates and directs consumption in its most privileged and durable expression, that of economic ownership.

Suppose that, quite hypothetically, I attempt to promote a number of aerial photographs as esthetic objects. But, by constructing a *range* of valorizing readings of these prints, I will be engaging in a kind of meta-promotion, supplying an abundance of *possibilities*. Although only a single photograph may be at issue, I might want to mobilize the entire ensemble of available images, thereby subduing the arbitrary appearance of the solitary picture with a sense of an *oeuvre*, with a cryptic narrative of a purposeful esthetic journey through the skies with a camera. The tendency of a given image toward a certain arena of meaning can be balanced, redirected, or reinforced through reference to other images. The promoter engages in improvisational montage. Therefore the immediate range of semantic possibilities offered by these particular aerial photographs should be acknowledged. Separated in terms of camera position, or point-of-view, the available pictures tend toward two extremes: high verticals and low obliques. High verticals were taken with the camera perpendicular to the surface of the earth at altitudes of several thousand feet or more; low obliques were taken with an off-axis camera at altitudes as low as several hundred feet. Each of the two types gravitates toward a different kind of estheticized reading; one toward a denial of the referential properties of the image, and the other toward an acknowledgement of the reference.

High verticals are marked most strongly for planarity; the depicted landscape lacks specific meaning for an untrained viewer, for whom this is an alien view of the earth. The print will only yield its information, feature by feature and bit by bit, to a specialized reading, as I have suggested earlier. But cultured people are provided with a vocabulary of design and at least a minimal sense of art history. The promoter, seeing little value in imparting the tech-

niques of photo interpretation, moves in the direction of the design problem, which begins with the rectangularity of the print itself. A landscape possessed of humanly made features can be translated into the realm of a non-referential abstract geometry. The deployment of roads, trenches, city grids, and cultivated fields over the rectangular space of the image is lifted into a universe of spiritualized affect or simple enjoyment. But these readings lack a certain conviction unless an abstract motivation can be detected or invented in the photographer. Otherwise we have nothing but expensive found objects here, artifacts that have been granted a retroactive significance.

The promoter could boldly assert that Steichen must have had a premonition, or co-evolving dream, of Mondrian, Malevich and so on. But the promoter should know that Steichen had this, and as far as I can tell, only this, to say about the esthetic properties of aerial photographs in the period immediately following the war:

*The average vertical aerial photographic print is upon first acquaintance as uninteresting and unimpressive a picture as can be imagined The oblique aerial picture, especially when taken from a low altitude, is more readily comprehended, and sometimes striking pictorial effects are produced. The vertical photographs made by the day-bombing squadrons occasionally present a spectacular and dramatic interest in addition to their value as a record of the bomb raid.*⁵

This is hardly the language of abstraction. Steichen's enthusiasm for the aerial view is less extreme than that expressed later by Malevich and Moholy-Nagy. The hybrid scientism/mysticism of the Bauhaus seems to have been the most fertile ground for the esthetic celebration of the abstracted visual field of the air traveler. Moholy-Nagy (as well as Rodchenko and Kertész) "aerialized" street photography in the late 1920s by climbing on roofs, fire escapes, and towers to achieve an elevation from which to angle the camera downward. Malevich illustrated *The Non-Objective World* (1927) with a number of aerial photographs of urban complexes which he captioned as "the environment ('reality') which stimulates the Suprematist," going on to argue that "the environment corresponding to this new culture [of "non-objective Suprematism"] has been produced by the latest achievements of technology, and especially of aviation, so that one could also refer to Suprematism as 'aeronautical'."⁶ But the evocation of Malevich in relation to these vertical reconnaissance photographs takes on a perverse double meaning when one reads the following passage from *The Non-Objective World*:

*. . . the appropriate means of representation is always the one which gives fullest possible expression to feeling as such and which ignores the familiar appearance of objects. Objectivity, in itself, is meaningless . . . the concepts of the conscious mind are worthless. Feeling is the determining factor . . . It reaches a "desert" in which nothing can be perceived but feeling.*⁷

The "desert" is both cognitive and physical. The evidence of a

5. Steichen, "American Aerial Photography at the Front," p. 34.

6. Kasimir Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*, trans. Howard Dearstyne, Chicago, 1959, p. 24-25, p. 61.

7. Ibid., p. 67.

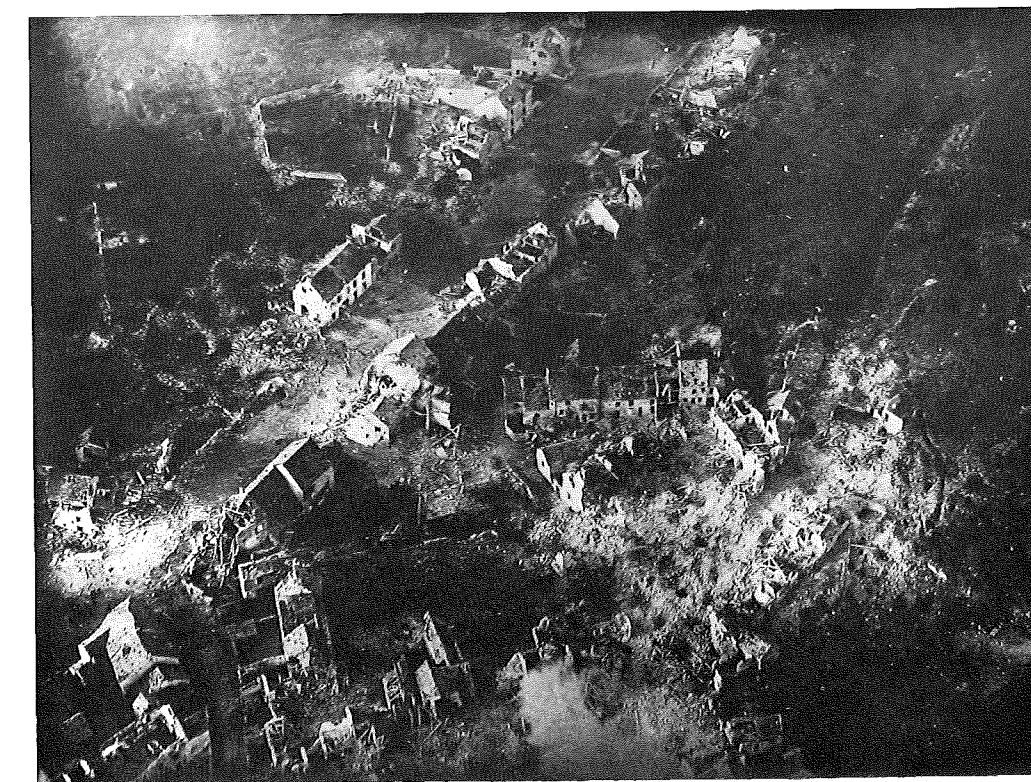
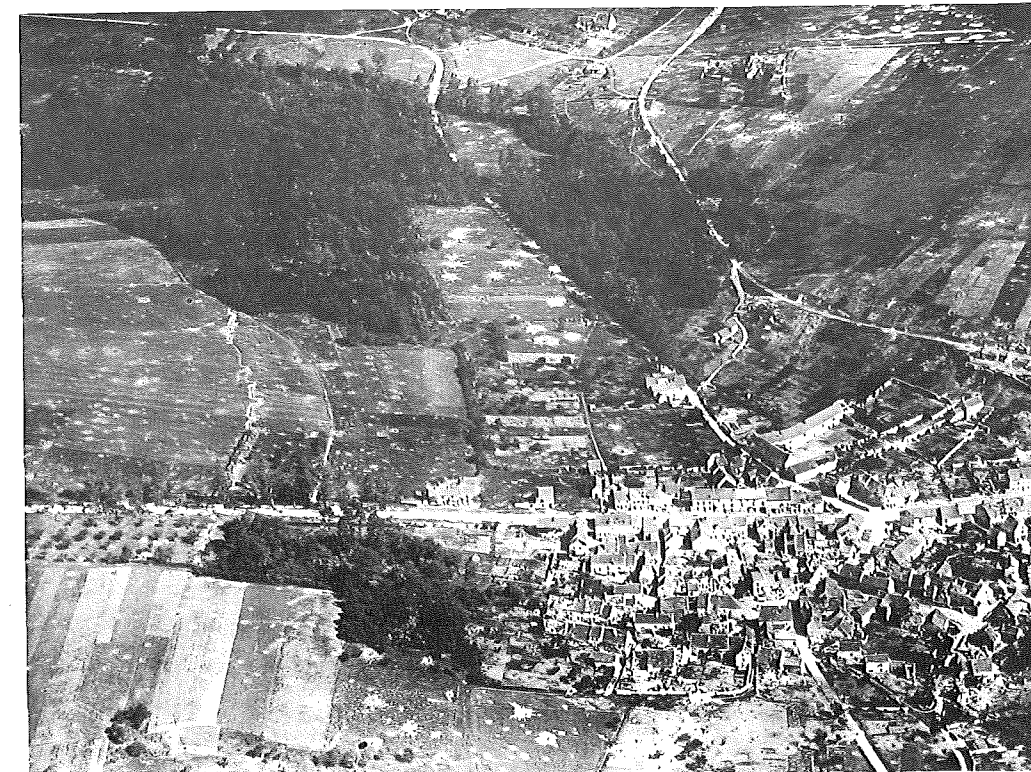


Figure 6: Detail from Figure 5. Vaux. Before last attack by American troops, June 30, 1918.

Figure 7: Detail from Figure 5. Vaux. Victory. American troops entering village visible left end of main street. Enemy dead in center. July 1, 1918.

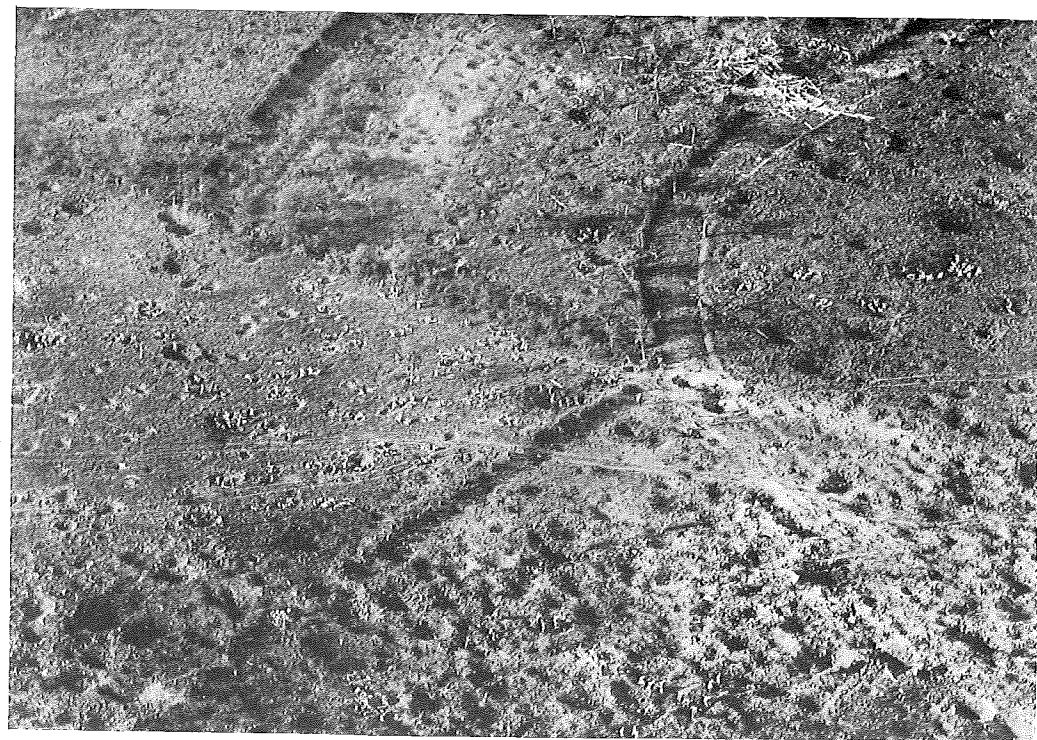


Figure 8: Detail from Figure 5: Vaux. After final retreat. Roads repaired. July 18, 1918.

Figure 9: Oblique photograph showing infantry in undergrowth and shell craters, c. 1918. Photographer unknown, Photographic Section, A.E.F.

blasted landscape disappears in a haze of art experience. Of course Malevich may have kept air war from his mind when he praised the new technology for its esthetic potential. But although abstraction may try to excuse itself from any ideological stance in relation to its sources, it remains implicated by the very act of denial. One abstracts these photographs at the expense of all other meanings, including the use to which they were originally put.

Low-oblique aerial photographs offer an image that is less vulnerable to abstraction. The promoter would have a hard time denying the detailed presence of shattered towns, cratered and excavated no-man's-lands, and occasional human figures. But Steichen's remark about "striking pictorial effects" is indicative of the ease with which some of these photographs fall into an already established genre of beautification, that of landscape photography. In fact, a particular low-oblique print might most profitably be promoted as an example of genre overlap, as an intersection of two traditions: landscape photography and war photography. A narrative montage might be constructed to mediate between the romantic-natural and the destructive-cultural. "As the airplane circles the front lines, the photographer's resolve stiffens at the sight of devastation; he aims his camera and produces a concerned document of man's inhumanity to man. Seconds later, the airplane banks against the afternoon sun and the mud-filled craters glisten with reflected light; a new exposure is made: in the innocent eye of the photographer nature has momentarily triumphed over war." More sophisticated variations could be concocted than the one I have just invented.

When it occurs, the human presence is peculiarly marked in these photographs. This markedness derives from a conflict between scale and desire; the human figure has to be searched out, dragged out, of the image. The anonymity of combatants and civilians teeters on the edge of invisibility. A cratered landscape is littered with tiny upright figures, some grouped in trenches, some exposed on open ground. Only the most equivocal narrative can be constructed. Are they enemies? Is this a battle? The human content of the event is valued for both humane and voyeuristic reasons, and yet this content is virtually unknowable. Herein lies the pathos of one sort of estheticized reading. The image consumer experiences a kind of cognitive dissonance in having been caught between the false power and the impotence of the pornographic spectator. On the one hand, the aerial viewpoint contributes to an illusion of power and knowledge; on the other, little can be known and whatever happened has happened.

On another level of meaning, estheticized documentary readings of war photographs tend to localize the human experience of war in the person of the photographer, who is usually male. The photographer becomes the sole subject, the exemplary sufferer, the risk taker, the heroic embodiment of courage and moral outrage. Within this myth, the photographer, in his work, transcends com-

plicity and politics; his sympathies are universal. What is valued is a kind of transcendental mannerism under fire. By promoting the war photographer as a "concerned" and "innocent" witness, liberal ideology promotes an image of its own bogus humanism, while denying the fact that information, too, has been mobilized. Sometimes the attempt to invent documentary heroics becomes patently absurd, as in this review of the "Steichen" prints:

In one of these pictures, a view of the Château de Blois, we can see the shadow of Steichen's tiny aircraft cast against the immense facade of the building, a vivid reminder of the perils involved in this documentary enterprise.⁸

To what end were these perils endured, and who really endured them? That which is here called a "documentary enterprise," suggesting a certain artistic neutrality, is in fact a reconnaissance mission. Since Steichen was a commander rather than a combat photographer, we have no reason to believe that this airplane was his; and even if it was, should more be thought of his occasional risks than of the everyday terror suffered by anonymous soldiers and civilians?

A final possibility remains. With these aerial photographs, it might be possible to have one's war and enjoy it too. There is one reading that acknowledges and celebrates the documentary status of the image while translating the representation into an abstraction. It takes a fascist, rather than a liberal, sensibility to effect this unqualified beautification of warfare. Marinetti's manifesto on the Ethiopian colonial war is a concise statement of the metaphysics of this celebration: "War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into a symphony."⁹ War, in Marinetti's mind, achieved the abstract condition of music; the exercise of reactionary political violence became an occasion for synesthetic rapture. But Marinetti was speaking merely as an ideologue, as a conceptual thug. These sentiments are more than ominous in the mouth of a poeticizing bombardier. Mussolini's son Vittorio recalled an almost photographic impression of the Ethiopian war:

I still remember the effect I produced on a small group of Galla tribesmen massed around a man in black clothes. I dropped an aerial torpedo right in the centre, and the group opened up just like a flowering rose. It was most entertaining.¹⁰

This deliberately terrorist manipulation of language pivots on a drastic shift from report to metaphor, and from a bombardier's complicity to a poet's delectation. These are not populist sentiments; only a masculine elite is likely to enjoy war in such an effete way. Above all else, Futurism is a defense of the connoisseur in the teeth of a "rationalized" world order. Futurism attempts to resuscitate the masculinity of warfare *within* the logic of mechanization. Masses of conscripts submit to this logic. But the fascist warrior-dandy is the only *subject* capable of both surviving and relishing war's "dreamt of metalization of the human body."¹¹

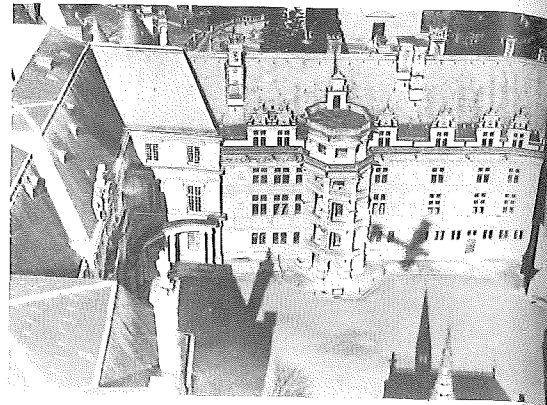


Figure 10: Château de Blois, 1918. Photographer unknown, Photographic Section, A.E.F.

8. Hilton Kramer, "The Young Steichen: Painter with a Camera," *The New York Times*, June 16, 1974. This was a review of an exhibition at the Scott Elliot Gallery, New York.

9. F. T. Marinetti, quoted in Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, New York, 1969, p. 241.

10. Vittorio Mussolini, *Volli sulle Amba* (1936), quoted in A. J. Barker, *The Civilizing Mission: A History of the Italo-Ethiopian War of 1935-1936*, New York, 1968, p. 234.

11. Marinetti, in Benjamin, p. 241.

12. Carl Sandburg, *Smoke and Steel*, New York, 1920.

Nowadays, American military contractors and bureaucrats have managed almost completely to rationalize the same procedures that Italian fascism sought to decorate. On a strategic bomb-run over Indochina the most important questions of taste had to do with the flavor of the box-lunch sandwiches. This technical development has been accompanied by two separate and mutually exclusive American establishment attitudes toward war. On the one hand we have had the pragmatic "realism" of Herman Kahn, Curtis LeMay, McGeorge Bundy, and so on. On the other stands the sentimentalism and patriarchal-familial ideology of performances like the P.O.W. homecoming and the Vietnamese and Cambodian "orphans" airlift. American militarism replaces the Futurist dandy with the schizophrenic figure of the father-professional.

So, in a certain sense, the claim for Steichen's authorship of these aerial photographs cannot help but be an implicit argument for a return to a romantic, sentimentalized image of warfare, an attempt to find a benign genius in a mechanized wasteland. But none of this is really new. Consider for a moment Carl Sandburg's lyrical dedication to *Smoke and Steel*, published in 1920:

To Colonel Edward J. Steichen, painter of nocturnes and faces, camera engraver of glints and moments, listener to blue evening winds and new yellow roses, dreamer and finder, rider of great mornings in gardens, valleys, battles.¹²

With that I will turn to the problem of biography.

IV

The esthetic and market value of these photographs depends on their being taken as significant moments in a celebrated creative life; rather than as refuse of a war between imperialist powers over markets, or as products of mechanized conscript labor, or as examples of a developing military intelligence technology, and so on. Of all the legitimizing narratives that might transform the artifacts into unique esthetic objects, the most important are biographical. No credible argument can be made for Steichen's authorship unless the photographs can be made to fit a logical account of his career. Since this is not an instance of Pop promotion, the connection must be made in terms of creativity, rather than, say, leadership ability. The quasi-corporate character of the productive enterprise must yield to a myth of inspiration. Once the connection has been made, Steichen's already established place in the photographic pantheon insures the value of the prints.

Suppose someone tried to promote Steichen's wartime experiences as "the drama of emergent modernism" or as "the triumph of straight photography over outdated pictorialism." World War I provides a convenient historical juncture for segmenting the history of American art photography. With the right public relations job, Steichen could be said to embody that history. *Camera Work* stopped publishing in 1917 with a final issue on Paul Strand. Strand represented a polemical, fully developed modernist position. His

1917 statement on photography is an archetypal formulation of Clement Greenberg's demand that a truly modernist art determine "through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself."¹³ Strand's insistence on a "complete uniqueness of means," on the "absolute unqualified objectivity" of hard focus, was a repudiation of pictorial photography, which had achieved its high place in the world through an earlier, systematic repudiation of realism.¹⁴

Pictorialism had a complex and erratic relationship to painting, too complex to go into here in any detail. Pictorial photographers found their imagery, their mannerisms, and their explanatory rhetoric in a wholesale raid on the history of painting, culling features from the old masters, impressionism, academicism, symbolism, and art nouveau. A pictorial photograph was less a representation of the world, than a representation of painting as the repository of high-art values. That is, the overall endeavor was to produce markedly crafted, "painterly" works, works that looked like legitimate art rather than everyday photography.

Steichen's 1901 *Self Portrait with Brush and Palette*, which he referred to as "photography's answer to [Titian's] *Man with a Glove*" is almost absurdly mannerist; a huge brushstroke trails across the emulsion from the photographically depicted image of a paintbrush.¹⁵ Aside from its hubris and its suggestion of the artist's dual career, this picture displays a curious confusion of icon and special effects. But by 1917 pictorialism had lost its credibility as a vanguard strategy. Even Steichen, the painter-photographer, was producing sharp-focus prints of frogs in lily ponds.

Reductivist, idealizing narratives of Steichen's life during and immediately after the war usually present the following chain of events. During the war, Steichen was masterfully involved in the production of sharp-focus aerial photographs. Following the armistice he retired in a state of depression to his French country home. After a period of reflection, he made a bonfire out of his paintings, vowing never to paint again. Steichen then spent three months making over one thousand photographs of a cup and saucer placed against a graduated scale of tones.

This narrative suggests that the aerial photographs provided the inspiration for a modernist redefinition of the medium. The cup-and-saucer experiment was a compulsive and thorough search for technical means within the boundaries of sharp-focus, non-painterly representation. As such, it could be seen as an almost therapeutic rerun of the problems encountered in aerial reconnaissance work. But this time the operation occurred on a domestic, auteurist scale. An arena of personal esthetic control was recovered from under the shadow of military-industrial realism.¹⁶

But Steichen's autobiography represents this transition in ethical, as well as esthetic, terms. The fundamental dilemma was not modernist at all:

... the photographs we made provided information that, con-

intelligence to clarify it. The assignment sharpened Steichen's photographic interests, and he was soon to abandon painting altogether." (Hilton Kramer, "Exhibiting the Family of Man," *Commentary*, Vol. 20, No. 4, October 1955, p. 365.)

13. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Arts Yearbook*, No. 4, 1961, p. 103.

14. Paul Strand, "Photography," *Seven Arts*, August 1917, p. 524.

17. Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, n.p.

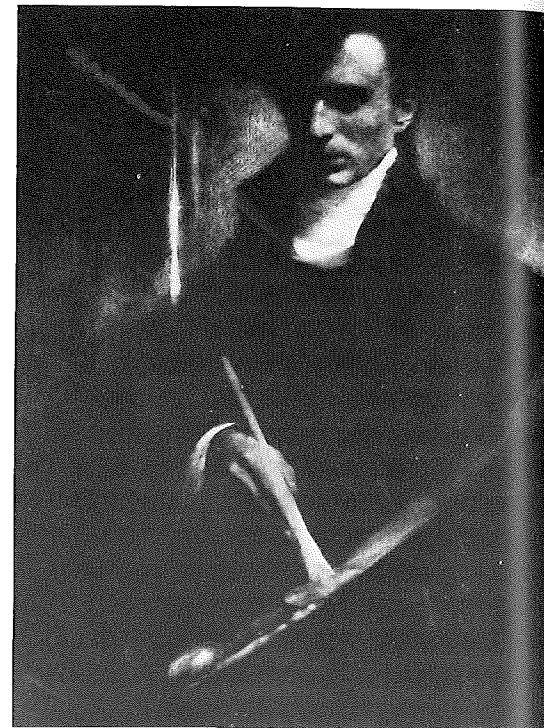


Figure 11: Edward Steichen, *Self Portrait with Brush and Palette*, 1901. Gum print. Photogravure published in *Camera Work*, April 1903.

15. Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, n.p.

16. Shortly after completing this essay, I came across an early version of this general argument in the claim that Steichen's First World War experience "was one of those unlikely moments in the history of a career when a man's avant-garde aesthetic inclinations could be fulfilled by a military assignment, for aerial photography was still in an unformed state, requiring an experimental and imaginative

veyed to our artillery, enabled them to destroy their targets and kill. A state of depression remained with me for days, but gradually there came a feeling that, perhaps, in the field of art, there might be some way of making an affirmative contribution to life. . . . I was through with painting. Painting meant putting everything I felt or knew into a picture that would be sold in a gold frame and end up as wallpaper. . . . I would learn how to make photographs that could go on a printed page, for now I was determined to reach a large audience instead of the few people I had reached as a painter.¹⁷

In this idealized reinvention of his own life, Steichen does not see the problem as one of painting versus photography. Rather, the narrative suggests a three-way opposition between non-instrumental communications, negatively-instrumental communications, and positively-instrumental communications. Painting, by virtue of its elitism, was dismissed as having no moral effect. But now we encounter a momentous and overtly ideological decision. Steichen "decided" that a humanist, life-affirming art was possible within the context of corporate mass communications. The cup-and-saucer exercise was performed in anticipation of the demands of mechanical reproduction, in anticipation of his portraits and fashion photos for Condé Nast and advertising work for J. Walter Thompson during the 1920s and 30s. Steichen, the liberal technician, was able to condemn war while recovering its beneficial technical fallout.

But as an advertising photographer, Colonel Steichen had merely enlisted in a new war, a war for new domestic markets. (Despite his "pacifist" sentiments, Steichen retained his military titles throughout his civilian career.) In the 1920s capitalism began its massive ideological campaign to reinvent the family as a bottomless receptacle for goods. Steichen was one of the most visible promoters of a glamorized universe of commodities. The cup and saucer was only the beginning:

If my technic, imagination and vision is any good, I ought to be able to put the best values of my non-commercial and experimental photography into a pair of shoes, a tube of tooth paste, a jar of face cream, a mattress or any object that I want to light up and make humanly interesting in an advertising photograph.¹⁸

Steichen proposed to beautify the banal. To promote these sentiments as a brand of proto-Pop would be both stupid and erroneous. Although it was eventually recuperated, Pop emerged from outside the spectacle of mass consumption. Early Pop was polemically directed at the heroics of high culture, the Pop artist sought to banalize the very question of beauty. At its most intelligent, Pop was metalinguistic in relation to fragments of the spectacle, and was produced by quasi-bohemian spectators, rather than by corporate agents. Steichen, on the other hand, faced the assembly line with an uncritical and confident romanticism.

But advertising photography presents an image, not only of commodities, but of human relationships mediated by commodi-

18. Steichen, letter to Carl Sandburg, quoted in *Photography Year 1974*, (Time-Life), New York, p. 214.

ties. As Steichen put it, the object is made “humanly interesting.” It was in the construction of a sentimentalized, utopian familial universe that Steichen performed his greatest service, a service for which he was well paid. In the Steichen family, motherhood and paternity are clearly delineated, and are always subordinated to an implicit corporate authority. At some point, *The Family of Man* will have to be understood as a profoundly corporate image of the world, as a Cold War utopia, but that problem is beyond the scope of my present argument. Suffice it to say that this authoritarian artwork, a virtual celebration of editorial power over the images of individual photographers, paraded as an example of American cultural freedom.¹⁹

The myth of Steichen’s career can be regarded as a laudatory monologue in which contemporary American bourgeois culture congratulates itself for both its elitism and its “populism.” Almost as much as Stieglitz, Steichen manipulated and directed the promotion of photography as a high art. Years later, at the Museum of Modern Art, he was able to exert patriarchal authority over direction of the medium to “popular” ends, while at the same time serving as an institutional patron of “vanguard” photography. Steichen personifies an illusory totality. As a legendary figure, he stands for the medium in all of its social operations, for the unification of the antagonistic poles of photographic practice. As myth, his career resolves antagonisms between instrumentality and estheticism, ubiquity and preciousness, commercialism and bohemianism, and “low culture” and “high culture.” Consider the following fragment from an appreciation written in 1961:

Steichen has known the great of this world . . . the artists, the writers, the champions, the actors, the stars. He has observed the limits of luxury and fashion.

He has observed the simple people, the workers. He has observed the world, and men, from airplanes and fighting ships. He has observed the separate ingredients of nature . . .

Few artists have had this unique opportunity of a global vision of life. *Steichen was born at a right time; his time, with its new means of transportation and communication, has permitted him to have this unique civilizing exposure.*²⁰ [Emphasis mine]

What is striking about this statement, aside from its worldly middle-class smugness, is the extent to which it lifts Steichen above the limitations of modernism. A “global vision of life” is not the same thing as a definitive vision of the medium. Steichen’s career did not conform to the artist’s role dictated by orthodox modernism; he was artist, patron and promoter rolled into one. He had an expansionist and overtly instrumental image of photography’s possibilities. The only way that modernist criticism can find a legitimate *oeuvre* in Steichen’s work is by performing closure around absurdly small portions of his career. In modernist terms, most of his work could be dismissed as confused, inconsistent, commercial, naive, insufficiently true to the medium, eclectic, cliché-ridden, hybridized, stupid, lacking quality, and so on; but none of this



Figure 12: Edward Steichen, Advertising photograph for Eastman Kodak Company series, *Snapshots*, 1933. J. Walter Thompson Agency.

19. See “The Traffic in Photographs” in this volume.

20. Alexander Liberman, “Steichen’s Eye,” *Steichen the Photographer*, (MoMA) New York, 1961, p. 13.

In Memoriam EDWARD STEICHEN

March 27, 1879–March 25, 1973

To
EDWARD STEICHEN
Painter of nocturnes and faces, camera engraver
of glints and moments, listener to blue
evening winds and new yellow roses,
dreamer and finder, rider of great
mornings in gardens, valleys,
battles.

Carl Sandburg, dedication of *Steichen and His World* 1960

Figure 13: Commemorative plaque. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

would lead to an understanding of his importance.

The only consistent vectors in Steichen’s career were sentimentalism, opportunism, and a fierce dedication to craft; the first two lead directly into his becoming a benign ideological agent of corporate political power. Throughout the larger part of his career, in his advertising and fashion work and his monumental “photo essays,” Steichen contributed to a falsified image of the family, of women, of consumption, of war and international politics, and of cultural freedom. A “global vision of life,” even in its “humanist” and liberal manifestations, may serve only to mask another vision, a vision of global domination.

There is a certain irony, then, in the fact that the photography galleries at the Museum of Modern Art are named in Steichen’s honor. What other institution could so eloquently promote the myth of the autonomous and unimplicated photographer-artist, the myth of everything Steichen was not?

1975

Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)

I

Suppose we regard art as a mode of human communication, as a discourse anchored in concrete social relations, rather than as a mystified, vaporous, and ahistorical realm of purely affective expression and experience. Art, like speech, is both symbolic exchange and material practice, involving the production of both meaning and physical presence. Meaning, as an understanding of that presence, emerges from an interpretive act. Interpretation is ideologically constrained. Our readings of past culture are subject to the covert demands of the historical present. Mystified interpretation universalizes the act of reading, lifting it above history.

The meaning of an artwork ought to be regarded, then, as *contingent*, rather than as immanent, universally given, or fixed. The Kantian separation of cognitive and affective faculties, which provided the philosophical basis for Romanticism, must likewise be critically superseded. This argument, then, calls for a fundamental break with idealist esthetics, a break with the notion of genius both in its original form and in its debased neo-romantic appearance at the center of the mythology of mass culture, where "genius" assumes the trappings of a charismatic stardom.

I am not suggesting that we ignore or suppress the creative, affective, and expressive aspects of cultural activity, to do so would be to play into the hands of the ongoing technocratic obliteration of human creativity. What I am arguing is that we understand the extent to which art *redeems* a repressive social order by offering a wholly imaginary transcendence, a false harmony, to docile and isolated spectators. The cult of private experience, of the entirely affective relation to culture demanded by a consumerist economy, serves to obliterate momentarily, on weekends, knowledge of the fragmentation, boredom, and routinization of labor, knowledge of

the self as a commodity.

In capitalist society, artists are represented as possessing a privileged subjectivity, gifted with an uncommon unity of self and labor. Artists are the bearers of an autonomy that is systematically and covertly denied the economically objectified mass spectator, the waged worker and the woman who works without wages in the home. Even the apparatus of mass culture itself can be bent to this elitist logic. "Artists" are the people who stare out, accusingly and seductively, from billboards and magazine advertisements. A glamorous young couple can be seen lounging in what looks like a SoHo loft; they tell us of the secret of white rum, effortlessly gleaned from Liza Minelli at an Andy Warhol party. Richard Avedon is offered to us as an almost impossible ideal: bohemian as well as his "own Guggenheim Foundation." Artist and patron coalesce in a petit-bourgeois dream fleshed-out in the realm of a self-valorizing mass culture. Further, the recent efforts to elevate photography unequivocally to the status of high art by transforming the photographic print into a privileged commodity, and the photographer, regardless of working context, into an autonomous *auteur* with a capacity for genius, have the effect of restoring the "aura," to use Walter Benjamin's term, to a mass-communications technology. At the same time, the camera hobbyist, the consumer of leisure technology, is invited to participate in a delimited and therefore illusory and pathetic creativity, in an advertising induced fantasy of self-authorship fed by power over the image machine, and through it, over its prey.

The crisis of contemporary art involves more than a lack of "unifying" metacritical thought, nor can it be resolved by expensive "interdisciplinary" organ transplants. The problems of art are refractions of a larger cultural and ideological crisis, stemming from the declining legitimacy of the liberal capitalist worldview. Putting it bluntly, these crises are rooted in the materially dictated inequalities of advanced capitalism and will only be resolved *practically*, by the struggle for an authentic socialism.

Artists and writers who move toward an openly political cultural practice need to educate themselves out of their own professional elitism and narrowness of concern. A theoretical grasp of modernism and its pitfalls might be useful in this regard. The problem of modernist closure — of an "immanent critique" which, failing to overcome logically the paradigm within which it begins, ultimately reduces every practice to a formalism — is larger than any one intellectual discipline and yet infects them all.¹ Modernist practice is organized professionally and shielded by a bogus ideology of neutrality. (Even academic thuggeries like Dr. Milton Friedman's overtly instrumentalist "free market" economics employ the neutrality gambit.) In political-economic terms, modernism stems from the fundamental division of "mental" and "manual" labor under advanced capitalism. The former is further specialized and accorded certain privileges, as well as a managerial relation to the

1. For the definition of modernism as immanent critique, see Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Arts Yearbook*, No. 4, 1961, p. 103.

latter, which is fragmented and degraded. A ideology of separation, of petit-bourgeois upward aspiration, induces the intellectual worker to view the "working class" with superiority, cynicism, contempt, and glimmers of fear. Artists, despite their romanticism and propensity for slumming, are no exception.

The ideological confusions of current art, euphemistically labeled a "healthy pluralism" by art promoters, stem from the collapsed authority of the modernist paradigm. "Pure" artistic modernism collapses because it is ultimately a self-annihilating project, narrowing the field of art's concerns with scientific rigor, dead-ending in alternating appeals to taste, science and metaphysics. Over the past five years, a rather cynical and self-referential mannerism, partially based on Pop art, has rolled out of this cul-de-sac. Some people call this phenomenon "postmodernism." (Already, a so-called "political art" has been used as an end-game modernist bludgeon, as a chic vanguardism, by artists who suffer from a very real isolation from larger social issues. This would be bad enough if it were not for the fact that the art-promotional system converts everything it handles into "fashion," while dishing out a good quantity of liberal obfuscation.) These developments demonstrate that the only necessary rigor in a commodified cultural environment is that of incessant artistic self-promotion. Here elite culture becomes a parasitical "mannerist" representation of mass culture, a private-party sideshow, with its own photojournalism, gossip column reviews, promoters, celebrity pantheon, and narcissistic stellar-bound performers. The charisma of the art star is subject to an overdeveloped bureaucratism. Careers are "managed." Innovation is regularized, adjusted to the demands of the market. Modernism, *per se* (as well as the lingering ghost of bohemianism), is transformed into farce, into a professionalism based on academic appointments, periodic exposure, lofty real estate speculation in the former factory districts of decaying cities, massive state funding, jet travel, and increasingly ostentatious corporate patronage of the arts. This last development represents an attempt by monopoly capital to "humanize" its image for the middle-managerial and professional subclasses (the vicarious consumers of high culture, the museum audience) in the face of an escalating legitimation crisis. High art is rapidly becoming a specialized colony of the monopoly capitalist media.

Political domination, especially in the advanced capitalist countries and the more developed neo-colonies, depends on an exaggerated symbolic apparatus, on pedagogy and spectacle, on the authoritarian monologues of school and mass media. These are the main agents of working class obedience and docility; these are the main promoters of phony consumer options, of "lifestyle," and increasingly, of political reaction, nihilism, and everyday sadomasochism. Any effective political art will have to be grounded in work *against* these institutions. We need a political economy, a sociology, and a non-formalist semiotics of media. We need to compre-

hend advertising as the fundamental discourse of capitalism, exposing the link between the language of manufactured needs and commodity fetishism. From this basis, a critical representational art, an art that points openly to the social world and to possibilities of concrete social transformation, could develop. But we will also have to work toward a redefined *pragmatics*, toward modes of address based on a dialogical pedagogy, and toward a different and significantly wider notion of audience, one that engages with ongoing progressive struggles against the established order. Without a coherent oppositional politics, though, an oppositional culture remains tentative and isolated. Obviously, a great deal needs to be done.

II

A small group of contemporary artists are working on an art that deals with the social ordering of people's lives. Most of their work involves still photography and video; most relies heavily on written or spoken language. I am talking about a representational art, an art that refers to something beyond itself. Form and mannerism are not ends in themselves. These works might be about any number of things, ranging from the material and ideological space of the "self" to the dominant social realities of corporate spectacle and corporate power. The initial questions are these: "How do we invent our lives out of a limited range of possibilities, and how are our lives invented for us by those in power?" As I have already suggested, if these questions are asked only within the institutional boundaries of elite culture, only within the "art world," then the answers will be merely academic. Given a certain poverty of means, this art aims toward a wider audience, and toward considerations of concrete social transformation.

We might be tempted to think of this work as a variety of documentary. That is all right as long as we expose the myth that accompanies the label, the folklore of photographic truth. This preliminary detour seems necessary. The rhetorical strength of documentary is imagined to reside in the unequivocal character of the camera's evidence, in an essential realism. The theory of photographic realism emerges historically as both product and handmaiden of positivism. Vision, itself unimplicated in the world it encounters, is subjected to a mechanical idealization. Paradoxically, the camera serves to ideologically *naturalize* the eye of the observer. Photography, according to this belief, reproduces the visible world: the camera is an engine of fact, the generator of a duplicate world of fetishized appearances, independent of human practice. Photographs, always the product of socially-specific *encounters* between human-and-human or human-and-nature, become repositories of dead facts, reified objects torn from their social origins.

I should not have to argue that photographic meaning is relatively indeterminate; the same picture can convey a variety of mes-

sages under differing presentational circumstances. Consider the evidence offered by bank holdup cameras. Taken automatically, these pictures could be said to be unpolluted by sensibility, an extreme form of documentary. If the surveillance engineers who developed these cameras have an esthetic, it is one of raw, technological instrumentality. "Just the facts, ma'am." But a courtroom is a battleground of fictions. What is it that a photograph points to? A young white woman holds a submachine gun. The gun is handled confidently, aggressively. The gun is almost dropped out of fear. A fugitive heiress. A kidnap victim. An urban guerrilla. A willing participant. A case of brainwashing. A case of rebellion. A case of schizophrenia. The outcome, based on the "true" reading of the evidence, is a function less of "objectivity" than of political maneuvering. Reproduced in the mass media, this picture might attest to the omniscience of the state within a glamorized and mystifying spectacle of revolution and counter-revolution. But any police photography that is publicly displayed is both a specific attempt at identification and a reminder of police power over "criminal elements." The only "objective" truth that photographs offer is the assertion that somebody or something — in this case, an automated camera — was somewhere and took a picture. Everything else, everything beyond the imprinting of a trace, is up for grabs.

Walter Benjamin recalled the remark that Eugène Atget depicted the streets of Paris as though they were scenes of crime.² That remark serves to poeticize a rather deadpan, non-expressionist style, to conflate nostalgia and the affectless instrumentality of the detective. Crime here becomes a matter of the heart as well as a matter of fact. Looking backward, through Benjamin to Atget, we see the loss of the past through the continual disruptions of the urban present as a form of violence against memory, resisted by the nostalgic bohemian through acts of solipsistic, passive acquisition. (Baudelaire's "Le Cygne" articulates much of that sense of loss, a sense of the impending disappearance of the familiar.) I cite this example merely to raise the question of the *affective* character of documentary. Documentary photography has amassed mountains of evidence. And yet, in this pictorial presentation of scientific and legalistic "fact," the genre has simultaneously contributed much to spectacle, to retinal excitation, to voyeurism, to terror, envy and nostalgia, and only a little to the critical understanding of the social world.

A truly critical social documentary will frame the crime, the trial, and the system of justice and its official myths. Artists working toward this end may or may not produce images that are theatrical and overtly contrived, they may or may not present texts that read like fiction. Social truth is something other than a matter of convincing style. I need only cite John Heartfield's overtly *constructed* images, images in which the formal device is absolutely naked, as examples of an early attempt to go beyond the phenomenal and

2. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), *Illuminations*, New York, 1969, p. 226.

ideological surface of the social realm. In his best work, Heartfield brings the economic base to the surface through the simplest of devices, often through punning on a fascist slogan. ("Millions stand behind me.") Here, construction passes into a critical *deconstruction*.

A political critique of the documentary genre is sorely needed. Socially conscious American artists have much to learn from both the successes *and* the mistakes, compromises, and collaborations of their Progressive Era and New Deal predecessors. How do we assess the close historical partnership of documentary artists and social democrats? How do we assess the relation between form *and* politics in the work of the more progressive Worker's Film and Photo League? How do we avoid a kind of estheticized political nostalgia in viewing the work of the 1930s? And how about the co-optation of the documentary style by corporate capitalism (notably the oil companies and the television networks) in the late 1940s? How do we disentangle ourselves from the authoritarian and bureaucratic aspects of the genre, from its implicit positivism? (All of this is evidenced in any one second of an Edward R. Murrow or a Walter Cronkite telecast.) How do we produce an art that elicits dialogue rather than uncritical, pseudo-political affirmation?

Looking backward, at the art-world hubbub about "photography as a fine art," we find a near-pathological avoidance of any such questioning. A curious thing happens when documentary is officially recognized as art. Suddenly the hermeneutic pendulum careens from the objectivist end of its arc to the opposite, subjectivist end. Positivism yields to a subjective metaphysics, technogism gives way to auteurism. Suddenly the audience's attention is directed toward mannerism, toward sensibility, toward the physical and emotional risks taken by the artist. Documentary is thought to be art when it transcends its reference to the world, when the work can be regarded, first and foremost, as an act of self-expression on the part of the artist. To use Roman Jakobson's categories, the referential function collapses into the expressive function.³ A cult of authorship, an auteurism, takes hold of the image, separating it from the social conditions of its making and elevating it above the multitude of lowly and mundane uses to which photography is commonly put. The culture journalists' myth of Diane Arbus is interesting in this regard. Most readings of her work careen along an axis between opposing poles of realism and expressionism. On the one hand, her portraits are seen as transparent, metonymic vehicles for the social or psychological truth of her subjects; Arbus elicits meaning from her sitters. At the other extreme is a metaphoric projection. The work is thought to express her tragic vision (a vision confirmed by her suicide); each image is nothing so much as a contribution to the artist's self-portrait. These readings coexist, they enhance one another despite their mutual contradiction. I think that a good deal of the generalized esthetic appeal of Arbus' work, along with that of most art photography, has to do with this

3. Roman Jakobson, "Linguistics and Poetics" (1958), in R. and F. DeGeorge, eds., *The Structuralists: From Marx to Levi-Strauss*, Garden City, 1972, pp. 84-122.

4. Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, Boston, 1975.

indeterminacy of reading, this sense of being cast adrift between profound social insight and refined solipsism. At the heart of this fetishistic cultivation and promotion of the artist's humanity is a certain disdain for the "ordinary" humanity of those who have been photographed. They become the "other," exotic creatures, objects of contemplation. Perhaps this would not be so suspect if it were not for the tendency of professional documentary photographers to aim their cameras downward, toward those with little power or prestige. (The obverse is the cult of celebrity, the organized production of envy in a mass audience.) The most intimate, human-scale relationship to suffer mystification in all this is the specific social engagement that results in the image; the negotiation between photographer and subject in the making of a portrait, the seduction, coercion, collaboration, or rip off. But if we widen the angle of our view, we find that the broader institutional politics of elite and "popular" culture are also being obscured in the romance of the photographer as artist.

The promotion of Diane Arbus (along with a host of other essentially mannerist artists) as a "documentary" photographer, as well as the generalized promotion of introspective, privatistic, and often narcissistic uses of photographic technology both in the arena of art photography and that of the mass consumer market, can be regarded as a symptom of two countervailing but related tendencies of advanced capitalist society. On the one hand, subjectivity is threatened by the increasingly sophisticated administration of daily life. Culture, sexuality, and family life are refuges for the private, feeling self in a world of rationalized performance-demands. At the same time, the public realm is "depoliticized," to use Jürgen Habermas' term; a passive audience of citizen-consumers is led to see political action as the prerogative of celebrities.⁴ Consider the fact that the major television networks, led by ABC, no longer even pretend to honor the hallowed separation demanded by liberal ideology between "public affairs" and "entertainment." News reporting is now *openly*, rather than covertly, stylized. The mass media portray a wholly *spectacular* political realm, and increasingly provide the ground for a charismatically directed, expressionist politics of the Right. Television has never been a realist medium, nor has it been capable of narrative in the sense of a logical, coherent account of cause and effect. But now, television is an openly *symbolist* enterprise, revolving entirely around the metaphoric poetry of the commodity. With the triumph of exchange value over use value, all meanings, all lies, become possible. The commodity exists in a gigantic substitution set, cut loose from its original context, it is metaphorically equivalent to all other commodities.

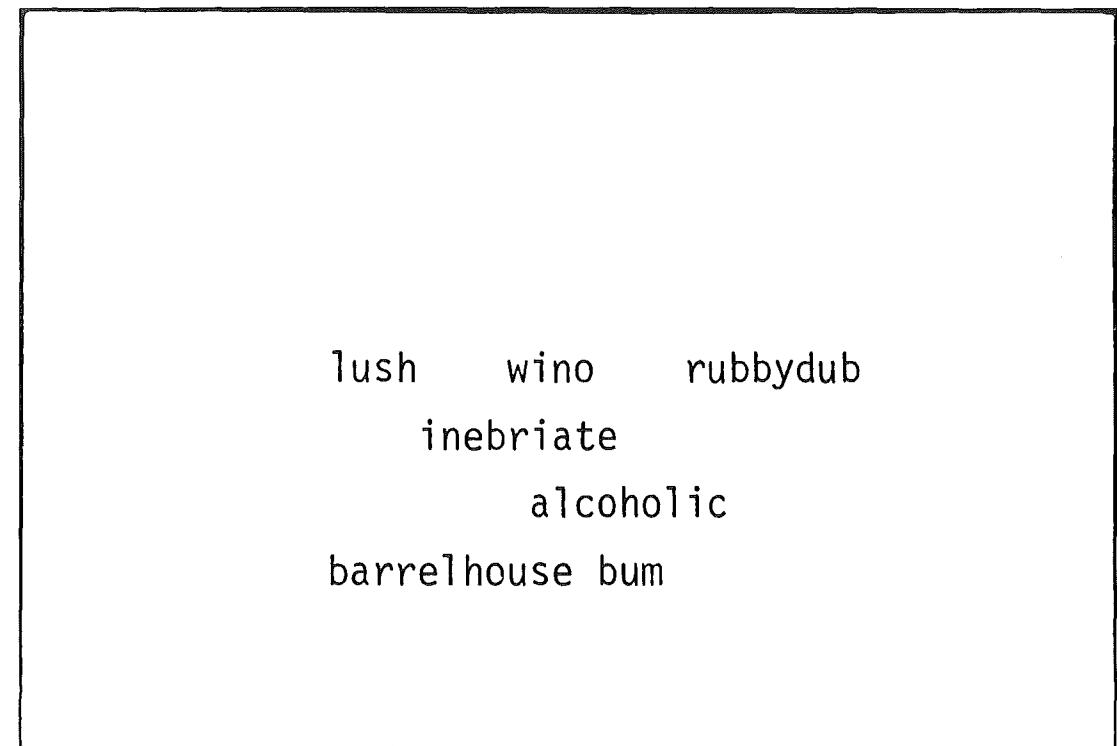
The high culture of the late capitalist period is subject to the unifying semantic regime of formalism. Formalism neutralizes and renders equivalent, it is a universalizing system of reading. Only formalism can unite all the photographs in the world in one room,

mount them behind glass, and *sell* them. As a privileged commodity fetish, as an object of connoisseurship, the photograph achieves its ultimate semantic poverty. But this poverty has haunted photographic practice from the very beginning.

I would like, finally, to discuss some alternative ways of working with photographs. A small number of contemporary photographers have set out deliberately to work against the strategies that have succeeded in making photography a high art. I have already outlined the general political nature of their intentions. Their work begins with the recognition that photography is operative at every level of our culture. That is, they insist on treating photographs not as privileged objects but as common cultural artifacts. The solitary, sparsely captioned photograph on the gallery wall is a sign, above all, of an aspiration toward the esthetic and market conditions of modernist painting and sculpture. In this white void, meaning is thought to emerge entirely from within the artwork. The importance of the framing discourse is masked, context is hidden. These artists, on the other hand, openly bracket their photographs with language, using texts to anchor, contradict, reinforce, subvert, complement, particularize, or go beyond the meanings offered by the images themselves. These pictures are often located within an extended narrative structure. I am not talking about "photo essays," a cliché-ridden form that is the noncommercial counterpart to the photographic advertisement. Photo essays are an outcome of a mass-circulation picture-magazine esthetic, the esthetic of the merchandisable column-inch and rapid, excited reading, reading made subservient to visual titillation. I am also not talking about the "conceptual" and "post-conceptual" art use of photography, since most such work unequivocally accepts the bounds of an existing art world.

Of the work I am dealing with here, Martha Rosler's *The Bowery in Two Inadequate Descriptive Systems* (1975) comes the closest to having an unrelentingly *metacritical* relation to the documentary genre.⁵ The title not only raises the question of representation, but suggests its fundamentally flawed, distorted character. The object of the work, its referent, is not the Bowery *per se*, but the "Bowery" as a socially mediated, ideological construction. Rosler couples twenty-four photographs to an equal number of texts. The photographs are frontal views of Bowery storefronts and walls, taken with a normal lens from the edge of the street. The sequence of street numbers suggests a walk downtown, from Houston toward Canal on the west side of the avenue, past anonymous grates, abandoned shopfronts, flop house entrances, restaurant supply houses, discreetly labeled doors to artist's lofts. No people are visible. Most of the photos have a careful geometric elegance, they seem to be deliberate quotations of Walker Evans. The last two photographs are close-ups of a litter of cheap rose- and white-port bottles, again not unlike Evans' 1968 picture of a discarded pine deodorant can in a trash barrel. The cool, deadpan mannerism

5. This work has since been reproduced in Martha Rosler, *3 Works*, Halifax, 1981.



Figures 1-2: Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*, 1975. Photographs and text (excerpt).

works against the often expressionist liberalism of the find-a-bum school of concerned photography. This anti-“humanist” distance is reinforced by the text, which consists of a series of lists of words and phrases, an immense slang lexicon of alcoholism. This simple listing of names for drunks and drunkenness suggests both the signifying richness of metaphor as well as its referential poverty, the failure of metaphor to “encompass,” to adequately explain, the material reality to which it refers.

We have nautical and astronomical themes: “deck’s awash” and “moon-eyed.” The variety and “wealth” of the language suggests the fundamental aim of drunkenness, the attempted escape from a painful reality. The photographs consistently pull us back to the street, to the terrain from which this pathetic flight is attempted. Rosler’s found poetry begins with the most transcendental of metaphors, “aglow, illuminated” and progresses ultimately, through numerous categories of symbolic escape mingled with blunt recognition, to the slang terms for empty bottles: “dead soldiers” and “dead marines.” The pool of language that Rosler has tapped is largely the socio-linguistic “property” of the working class and the poor. This language attempts to handle an irreconcilable tension between bliss and self-destruction in a society of closed options.⁶

The attention to language cuts against the pornography of the “direct” representation of misery. A text, analogous formally to our own ideological index of names-for-the-world, interposes itself between us and “visual experience.”

Most of Rosler’s other work deals with the internalization of oppressive namings, usually with the structuring of women’s consciousness by the material demands of sex and class. Her videotape, *The Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1976) portrays documentation as the clinical, brutal instrumentality of a ruling elite bent on the total administration of all aspects of social life: reproduction, child rearing, education, labor and consumption. A woman is slowly stripped by white-coated technicians, who measure and evaluate every “component” of her body. A voice-over meditates on violence as a mode of social control, on positivism, on the triumph of quantity, on the master’s voice that speaks from within. Rosler refers to the body as the fundamental “battleground” of bourgeois culture.

Since I have mentioned video, I ought to point out that the most developed critiques of the illusory facticity of photographic media have been cinematic, stemming from outside the tradition of still photography. With film and video, sound and image, or sound, image, and text, can be worked *over* and *against* each other, leading to the possibility of negation and meta-commentary. An image can be offered as evidence, and then subverted. Photography remains a primitive medium by comparison. Still-photographers have tended to believe naively in the power and efficacy of the single image. Of course, the museological handling of photographs encourages this belief, as does the allure of the high-art commodity

6. The reader may want to compare Rosler’s lexicon with one assembled under different conditions. See Edmund Wilson, “The Lexicon of Prohibition” (1929), in *The American Earthquake*, New York, 1958, pp. 89-91.

7. Bertolt Brecht, “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre” (1930), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willett, New York, 1964, p. 34.

market. But even photojournalists like to imagine that a good photograph can punch through, overcome its caption and story, on the power of vision alone. The power of the overall communicative system, with its characteristic structure and mode of address, over the fragmentary utterance is ignored. A remark of Brecht’s is worth recalling on this issue, despite his deliberately crude and mechanistic way of phrasing the problem:

*The muddled thinking which overtakes musicians, writers and critics as soon as they consider their own situation has tremendous consequences to which too little attention is paid. For by imagining that they have got hold of an apparatus which in fact has got hold of them they are supporting an apparatus which is out of their control. . . .*⁷

The critical anti-naturalism of Brecht, continued in the politically and formally reflexive cinematic modernism of Chris Marker, Godard, and the team of Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet stands as a guide to ideologically self-conscious handling of image and text. Americans, schooled in positivism from infancy, tend to miss the point. It was Americans who mistranslated the reflexive documentary methods of Dziga Vertov’s *Kino-Pravda* and Jean Rouch’s *cinéma-vérité* into “direct cinema,” the cult of the invisible camera, of life caught unawares. The advent of the formalist reflexivity of “structural film” has not helped matters either, but merely serves as a crude antithesis to the former tendency.

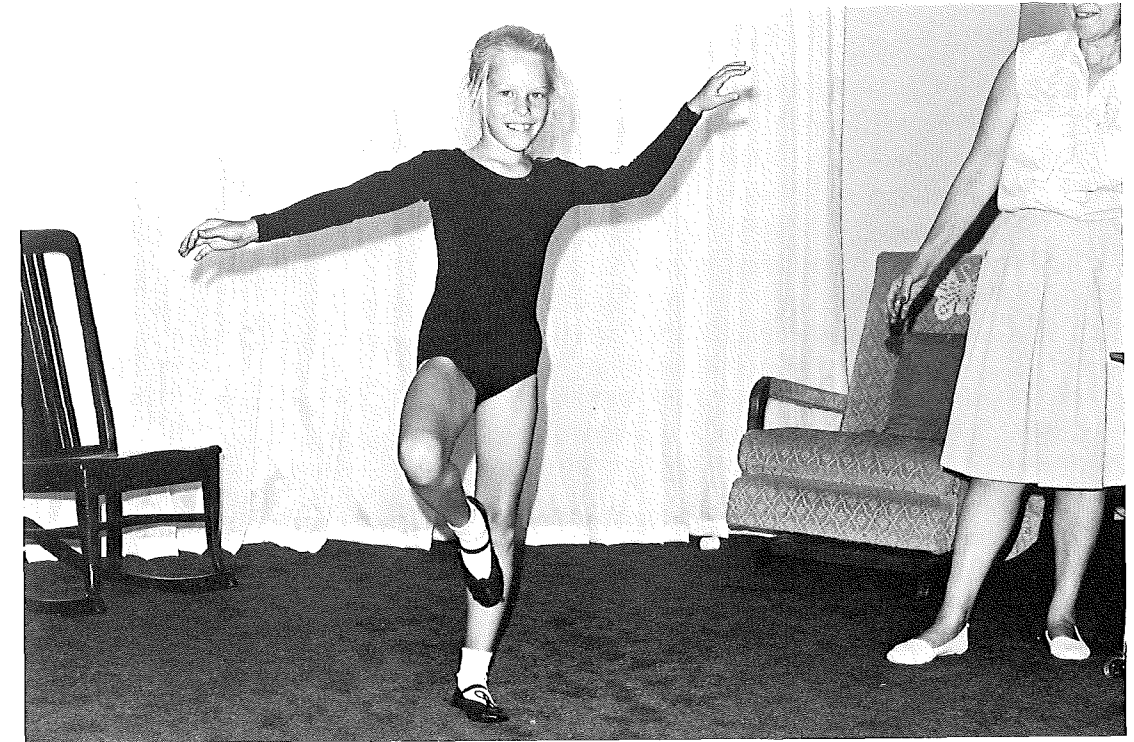
Jon Jost’s film *Speaking Directly* (1975) and Brian Connell’s videotapes *La Lucha Final* (1976) and *Petro Theater* (1975) stand as rare examples of American works that unite a developed left-wing politics with an understanding of the relation between form and ideology within the documentary genre. *La Lucha Final* dissects the already fragmented corpus of television news by constructing (perhaps deconstructing is the more appropriate word) a detective story narrative of American imperialism in crisis. The story emerges on the basis of scavenged material: State Department publicity photos, *Tet*-offensive news footage, bits of late night television movies. American agents are always asking the wrong questions too late. Another of Connell’s tapes, *Petro Theater*, decodes mysterious photo-postcard islands floating off the coast of Long Beach, California. These man-made oil drilling operations are disguised as tropical paradises, complete with palm trees and waterfalls. The derricks themselves are camouflaged as skyscrapers, made to pose as corporate headquarters. Connell’s tape reads the island as an image of colonial territory, as nature dominated by an aggressive and expansionist corporate order. The islands are named for dead astronauts, allowing the derricks to assume the glamor of moon rockets. Connell plays the offshore mirage against the political economy of the “energy crisis.” Photography like that of Lewis Baltz, to give a counter example, suggests that the oxymoronic label, “industrial park” is somehow natural, an unquestionable aspect of a landscape that is both a source of Pop disdain and mortu-

arial elegance of design. Baltz's photographs of enigmatic factories fail to tell us anything about them, to recall Brecht's remark about a hypothetical photograph of the Krupp works. Connell, on the other hand, argues that advanced capitalism depends on the ideological obliteration of the economic base. In California, we are led to believe, no one works, people merely punch in for eight hours of Muzak-soothed leisure in airconditioned condominium-like structures that are somehow sites for the immaculate conception of commodities.

Jost's *Speaking Directly* is a rigorously phenomenological attempt at political autobiography, setting Jost's own subjectivity as film maker, as he-who-speaks, as particular and emblematic male, as American, as war resister, as rural dropout, as intellectual, as lover, friend, and enemy to numerous Others, against its determinations and constraints. Jost is continually exposing the problematic character of his own authorship, suggesting his own dishonesty in attempting to construct a coherent image of "his" world. The film skirts solipsism; in fact, Jost resists solipsism through an almost compulsively repetitive rendering of a politicized "outer world." American defoliant bombers lay waste to a section of Vietnam again and again, until the viewer knows the sequence's every move in advance. Magazine advertisements pile up endlessly in another sequence. The "politics" of Jost's work lies in an understanding it shares with, and owes to, both the women's liberation movement and sections of the New Left; the understanding that sexuality, the formation of the self, and the survival of the autonomous subject are fundamental issues for revolutionary practice.

These concerns are shared to a large extent by Philip Steinmetz in a six-volume sociological "portrait" of himself and his relatives. The entire work, called *Somebody's Making a Mistake* (1976), is made up of more than six hundred photographs taken over several years. The pictures are well-lit, full of ironic incident and material detail, reminiscent of Russell Lee. Steinmetz pays a great deal of attention to the esthetics of personal style, to clothing and gesture, to interior decoration. His captions vary between sociological polemic and personal anecdote. The books are a curious hybrid of the family album and a variety of elegantly handcrafted coffee-table book. The narrative span of the family album is compressed temporally, resulting in a maddening intensity of coverage and exposure.

While covering intimate affairs, Steinmetz offers a synecdochic representation of suburban middle-class family life. At the same time the work is a complex autobiography in which Steinmetz invents himself and is in turn invented, appearing as eldest son, ex-husband, father, alienated and documentation-obsessed prime mover, and escapee with one foot in a suburban petit-bourgeois past. The work pivots on self-implication, on Steinmetz's willingness to expose his interactions with and attitudes toward the rest of the family. The picture books are products of a series of discon-



Mom: "Traci has learned how to set a beautiful table.
She has your artistic abilities."



DAD: "This isn't like communist Russia where they set down the rules and feed the people only one kind of propaganda until they believe that white is black."

Figures 3-4: Philip A. Steinmetz, *Somebody's Making a Mistake*, 1976. Photographic books with text (excerpt).

tinuous theatrical encounters; the artist "visits the folks." Some occasions are full of auspicious moments for traditional family-album photography: a birthday, a family dinner. Here Steinmetz is an insider, functioning within the logic of the family, expected, even asked to take pictures. At other moments the camera is pulled out with less fanfare and approval, almost on the sly, I imagine. Other encounters are deliberately staged by the photographer: on a weekend visit he photographs his daughter in front of an endless toy-store display of packaged games. She smiles rather quizzically. Judging from the titles, the games are all moral exercises in corporate virtue, male aggression, and female submission. I am reminded of a frame from Godard, but this picture has a different affect, the affect of real, rather than emblematic, relationships.

Eventually the artwork became a familial event in itself. Steinmetz visited his parents with a handful of his books, asking them to talk captions into a tape recorder. Other artists and photographers have done this sort of thing with family archives; Roger Welch is an example. The difference here is that Steinmetz is not particularly interested in memory and nostalgia in themselves. His pictures are geared to elicit ideological responses; they are subtle provocations. The work aims at revealing the power structure within the extended family, the petit-bourgeois ambitions of the men, their sense of ownership, and the supportive and subordinate role of the women. Steinmetz's father, a moderately successful building contractor, poses by the sign post for a subdivision street he named: Security Way. The photographer's mother sits in the kitchen reading a religious tract entitled *Nervous Christians*. He comes closest to identifying with his daughter, with the possibility of her rebellion.

The last of the six books deals with his ex-wife's second wedding. Steinmetz appears at a dress rehearsal — as what? Guest, interloper, official photographer, voyeur, ghost from the past? His wife's new in-laws look troubled. The pictures have a curious sense of the absurd, of packaged roles poorly worn, of consumer ritual. The camera catches a certain awkwardness of tuxedo-and-gown-encased gesture and movement. The groom is late, and someone asks Steinmetz to stand in for him. The affair takes on a television situation-comedy aspect as familial protocol lapses into absurdity.

Fred Lonidier deals with more public politics than that of the family. *The Health and Safety Game* (1976) is about the "handling" of industrial injury and disease by corporate capitalism, pointing to the *systemic* character of everyday violence in the workplace. Some statistics: one in four American workers is exposed on a daily basis to death, injury, and disease-causing work conditions. According to a Nader report, "job casualties are statistically at least three times more serious than street crime."⁸ (So much for T.V. cop shows.)

An observation: anyone who has ever lived or worked in an industrial working-class community can probably attest to the

8. Ralph Nader, "Introduction" to J. A. Page and M. O'Brien, *Bitter Wages*, New York, 1973, p. xiii.

9. W. Eugene Smith and Aileen Smith, *Minamata*, New York, 1975.

commonness of disfigurement among people on the job and in the street. Disease is less visible and has only recently become a public issue. I can recall going to the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry and visiting the "coal mine" there. Hoarse-voiced men, retired miners, led the tourists through a programmed demonstration of mining technology. When the time came to deal with safety, one of the guides set off a controlled little methane explosion. No one mentioned black-lung disease in this corporate artwork, although the evidence rasped from the throats of the guides.

Lonidier's "evidence" consists of twenty or so case studies of individual workers, each displayed on large panels laid out in a rather photojournalistic fashion. The reference to photojournalism is deliberate, I think, because the work refuses to deliver any of the empathic goodies that we are accustomed to in photo essays. Conventional "human interest" is absent. Lonidier is aware of the ease with which liberal documentary artists have converted violence and suffering into esthetic objects. For all his good intentions, for example, Eugene Smith in *Minamata* provided more a representation of his compassion for mercury-poisoned Japanese fisherfold than one of their struggle for retribution against the corporate polluter.⁹ I will say it again: the subjective aspect of liberal esthetics is compassion rather than collective struggle. Pity, mediated by an appreciation of "great art," supplants political understanding. Susan Sontag and David Antin have both remarked that Eugene Smith's portrait of a Minamata mother bathing her retarded and deformed daughter is a seemingly deliberate reference to the *Pietà*.

Unlike Smith, Lonidier takes the same photographs that a doctor might. When the evidence is hidden within the body, Lonidier borrows and copies X-ray films. These pictures have a brute, clinical effect. Each worker's story is reduced to a rather schematic account of injury, disease, hospitalization, and endless bureaucratic run-around by companies trying to shirk responsibility and liability. All too frequently we find that at the end of the story the worker is left unemployed and undercompensated. At the same time, though, these people are fighting. A machinist with lung cancer tells of stealing samples of dust from the job, placing them on the kitchen griddle in a home-made experiment to detect asbestos, a material that his bosses had denied using. The anonymity of Lonidier's subjects is a precaution against retaliation against them; many are still fighting court cases; many are subject to company intimidation and harassment if they do make their stories public.

Lonidier's presentation is an analog of sorts for the way in which corporate bureaucrats handle the problem of industrial safety, yet he subverts the model by telling the story from below, from the place occupied by the worker in the hierarchy. The case-study form is a model of authoritarian handling of human lives. The layout of the panels reflects the distribution of power. Quotes from the workers are set in type so small that they are nearly unreadable. The titles are set in large type: "Machinist's Lung," "Egg-Packer's

Arm.” The body and the life are presented as they have been fragmented by management. Injury is a loss of labor power, a negative commodity, overhead. Injury is not a diminishing of a human life but a statistical impingement on the corporate profit margin.

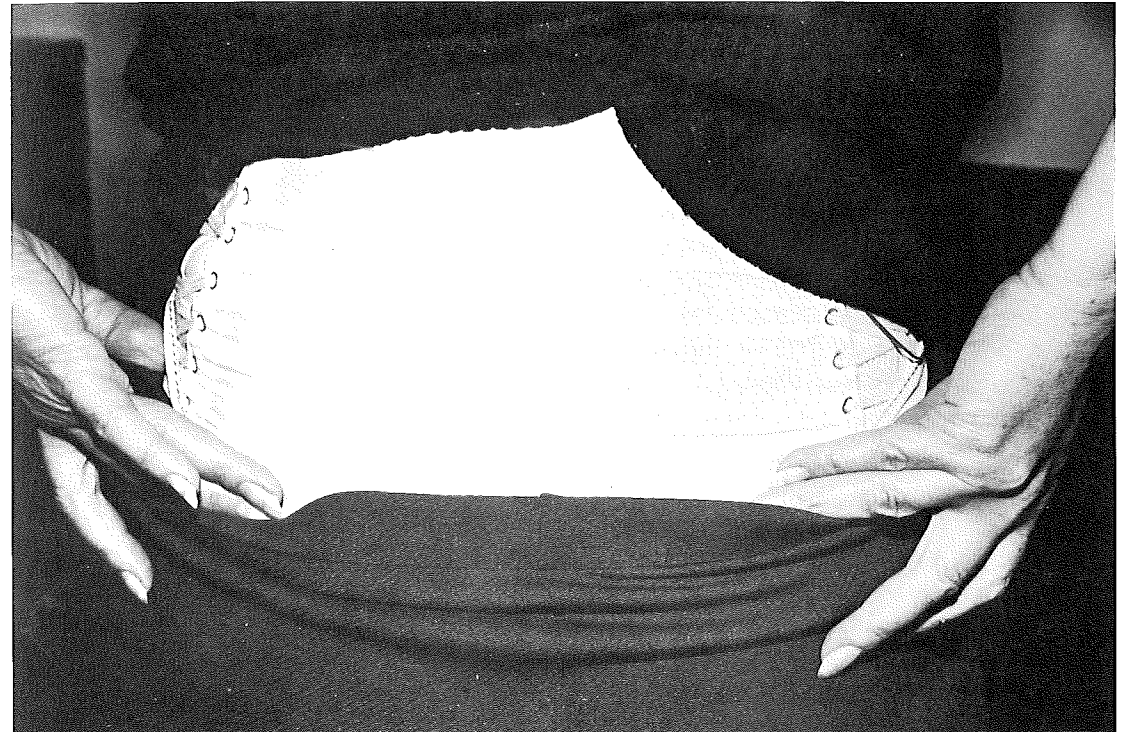
The danger exists, here as in other works of socially conscious art, of being overcome by the very oppressive forms and conditions one is critiquing, of being devoured by the enormous machinery of material and symbolic objectification. Political irony walks a thin line between resistance and surrender.

Above the case studies, Lonidier presents an analysis of the strategies employed by corporations and unions in the struggle over occupational health issues. The final corporate resorts are closed factories and runaway shops. But implicit in Lonidier’s argument is the conclusion that work *cannot*, in the long run, be made safe under capitalism, because of the absolute demand for increasing capital accumulation under escalating crisis conditions. Most businessmen know this, and are resisting reforms for that very reason. The health issue exposes an indifference to human life that goes beyond ethics, an indifference that is structurally determined and can only be structurally negated.

Lonidier’s aim is to present his work in a union hall context; so far showings have included a number of art-school galleries, a worker’s art exhibition at the Los Angeles Museum of Science and Industry, the Whitney Museum, AFSCME District Council 37 AFL-CIO in New York City (AFSCME, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, is the largest union of workers in the public sector in the United States), and at the Center for Labor Studies at Rutgers University.¹⁰

Since the late 1940s, anti-communism has been a dominant ideology within American organized labor. Thus, for obvious reasons, *The Health and Safety Game* only makes explicit a critique of the current monopoly stage of capitalist development, without pointing directly to the necessity of socialist alternatives. This is only one of the problems of working *through* labor bureaucracy and *toward* a rank-and-file audience. At the same time, it should be noted that a number of progressive unions, mostly in New York, are beginning to develop cultural programs. Potentially, this could amount to an attempt to counteract the hegemony of corporate culture and restore some of the working-class cultural traditions that were obliterated with the onslaught of the 1950s. Recent documentary films like Barbara Kopple’s *Harlan County, U.S.A.* (1976) and *Union Maids* (1976) by Julia Reichert and Jim Klein keep alive a tradition of working-class militancy, emphasizing the active role of women in struggle. Both films reveal the importance of oral history and song for maintaining working-class traditions, both emerge from the filmmakers’ partisan commitment to long-term work from *within* particular struggles. Neither of these films qualifies as the standard “neutral” airplane-ticket-in-the-back-pocket sort of documentary.

10. This work has since been reproduced in Fred Lonidier, “The Health and Safety Game,” *Praxis*, No. 6, 1982, pp. 77-97.



WAITRESS'S BACK. “He said he had known other comp. attorneys in the past that would work for the workers and really get in there and get for them what they deserved. Then the first thing you know they’d be becoming more pro-company, pro-company because it’s easier.”

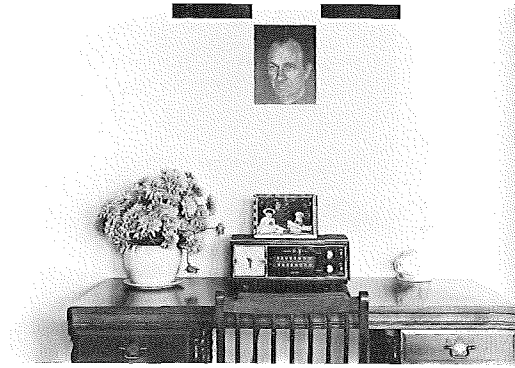


OIL WORKER'S BURNS. “When it really comes down to the nitty-gritty it’s the employees themselves who won’t really make a stand on safety. When it comes down to the bread-and-butter issue, if you make a strike issue over a safety matter, it’s going to take a lot more education, in my opinion.”

Figures 5-6: Fred Lonidier, The Health and Safety Game: Fictions Based on Fact, 1976. Photographs, text, and videotape (excerpt).

Nearly all the work I am discussing here demands a critical re-evaluation of the relationship between artists, media workers, and their "audiences." I am not suggesting that the mass media can effectively be infiltrated. Mass "communication" is almost entirely subject to the pragmatics of the one-way, authoritarian manipulation of consumer "choices." I think "marginal" spaces have to be discovered and utilized, spaces where issues can be discussed collectively: union halls, churches, high schools, community colleges, community centers, and perhaps only reluctantly, public museums. Still-photographers ought to consider "vulgar" and "impure" formats, such as slide shows; but formal questions can only follow a more fundamental redefinition of political priorities. A number of cultural workers in the Oakland area are using slide shows didactically and as catalysts for political participation. Bruce Kaiper has produced work on the capitalist image of labor using a critical reading of *Fortune* magazine advertisements and historical material on scientific management. Ellen Kaiper has done a piece on the forced layoffs and "domestication" of women industrial workers after the second World War. These shows are designed primarily for audiences of working people by people who are themselves workers. Fern Tiger is working on an extended documentation of class structure and conflict in Oakland. Her working method involves a lot of prolonged interaction with the people she photographs. She makes return visits with prints as part of an attempt to overcome the traditional aloofness of the merely contemplative sociological observer or journalistic photographer. Mel Rosenthal is involved in a similar project in the South Bronx.

My own work with photographs revolves around relationships between wage-labor and ideology, between material demands and our imaginary coming-to-terms with those demands. I use "autobiographical" material, but assume a certain fictional and sociological distance in order to achieve a degree of typicality. My personal life is not the issue; it is simply a question of a familiarity that forms the necessary basis for an adequate representational art. I have tended to construct narratives around crisis situations; around unemployment and work-place struggles, situations in which ideology fails to provide a "rational" and consoling interpretation of the world, unless one has already learned to expect the worst. What I have been interested in, then, is a failure of petit-bourgeois optimism, a failure that leads to either progressive or reactionary class identifications in periods of economic crisis. *Aerospace Folktales* (1973) is a family biography which focuses on the effects of unemployment on white collar technical workers, on people who have internalized a view of themselves as "professionals" and subsequently suffer the shock of being dumped into the reserve army of labor. I was interested in the demands unemployment places on family life, in the family as refuge, training ground and women's prison. As Max Horkheimer has noted, unemployment blurs the boundaries between the private and the social.¹¹ Private life be-



"... i photographed the inside of the apartment
... i photographed his resume ..."

Figure 7: Allan Sekula, *Aerospace Folktales*, 1973. Photographs, text, and audiotaped interviews (excerpt).



"... a political novel in which the workers were denied the privilege of psychological treatment
... a psychological novel in which the boss invented the workers ... a political novel in which the workers were allowed the privilege of psychological treatment ..."

Figure 8: Allan Sekula, *This Ain't China: A Photonovel*, 1974. Photographs and text (excerpt).

comes mere waiting for work, just, I might add, as work is increasingly a mode of waiting for life, for a delayed gratification. For men who have internalized the demands of production, forced idleness can breed both small and large insanities, from the compulsive straightening of lamps to despair and suicide.

This Ain't China (1974) is a photonovel which grew out of an attempt to unionize a restaurant. The work is a comedy about theatricalized food, about food as a central fetishized image in an organized drama of "service." Among other things, I wanted to portray the conditions under which people stop obeying orders, and in the way repetitive alienated work colonizes the unconscious, particularly work in crowded, greasy "backstage" kitchens.

Formally, I use long edited sequences of still photographs, usually broken up into "shots" of varying length, as well as lengthy novelistic texts and taped interviews. The photographs deliberately quote a variety of stylistic sources: from motion studies to a deadpan, clinical version of color food photography. The narrative moves self-consciously between "fictional" and "documentary" modes. A lot of scenes are staged. Both *Aerospace* and *China* have been shown on the wall, as books, and, most effectively in a political sense, as live slide-shows for people who have something other than a merely esthetic relation to the issues involved.

Chauncey Hare is a photographer who happens to have spent twenty years of his life as a chemical engineer. This biographical note is central to the meaning of his work. Of all the people I have discussed, he has the least relation to a hybridized, pictorially disrespectful narrative approach to the photographic medium. His photography grows out of a well-established documentary tradition, characterized by a belief in the efficacy of the single image, and a desire to combine formal elegance with a clarity of detail. The radicalism of Hare's work lies in his choice of a terrain and his identification with its inhabitants.

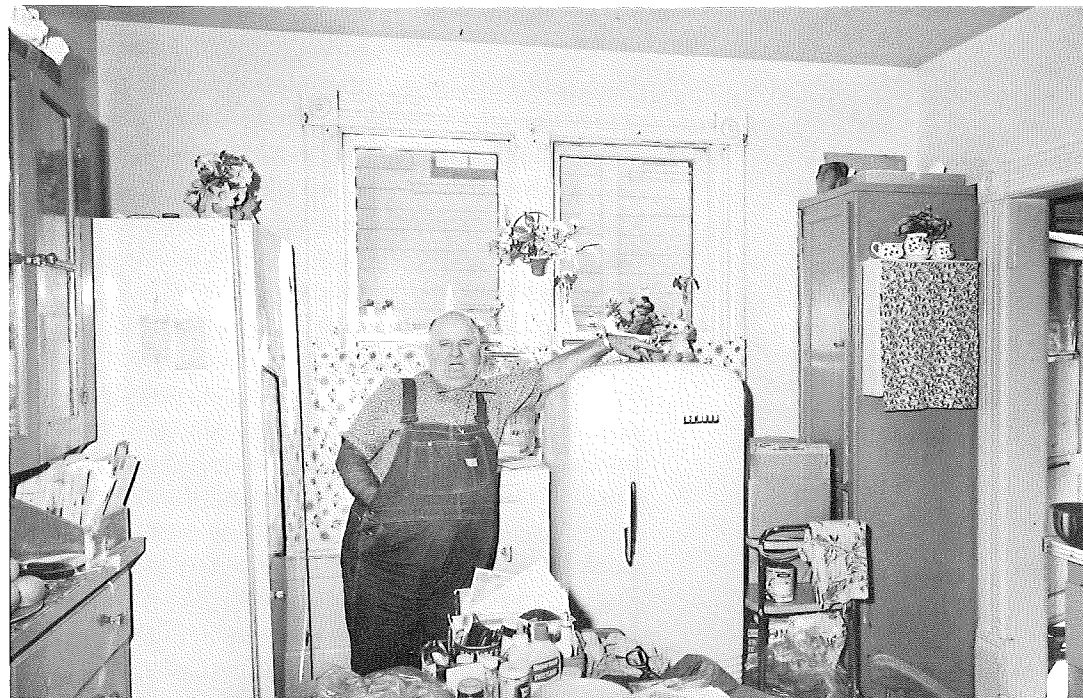
Hare is beginning to be known for work done over the past ten years while travelling across the United States, taking careful, tripod-mounted portraits of people, mostly working people, in their home environments. These images depict home life as a source of dignity and grace (his portrait-subjects are always on balance, sharing none of the grotesquery of Arbus or Bill Owens) and as something flawed, something invaded by the horrific sameness of a consumer culture. It is in the grasping of this dialectical character of family and private life, that Hare partakes of the same general critique I have been noting in the work of other politically aware photographers. This earlier work of Hare's, exhibited in 1977 at the Museum of Modern Art and published by Aperture as *Interior America*, continues in these contexts to reinforce the dominant American myth of the documentary photographer as a rootless wanderer, of art as the project of a contemplative, but voracious eye.¹²

Of course, Hare with his careful, sympathetic interactions,

11. Max Horkheimer, "Art and Mass Culture" (1937), *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al., New York, 1972, p. 276.



Control Room of a Crude Oil Distillation Unit, Standard Oil Refinery, Richmond, California, 1977.



Point Richmond, California, 1976. "I was a refinery stage rigger and was hurt permanently. I got no compensation from the oil company. I still pay for my own medicines. They use you and when they are done, well . . . it's tough for you!" [signed] Orville England, Standard Oil Co.

Figures 9-10: Chauncey Hare, *A Study of Standard Oil Company Employees*, 1976-77, photographs and audiotaped interviews (excerpt).

13. Photographs from this study will appear in Chauncey Hare, *This Was Corporate America*, Boston, 1984, forthcoming.

does not share the transcontinental anomic *flânerie* of the Robert Frank tradition. For the moment, then, I am more interested in a more recent project of Hare's, with the working title of "A Study of Standard Oil Company Employees" (1976-77).¹³ It is unlikely that this work will ever be exhibited at the Rockefeller-backed Museum of Modern Art, which is, after all, a cultural edifice built on Standard Oil profits, notwithstanding the "relative autonomy" of John Szarkowski's curatorial decisions. Using credentials as a Guggenheim photography fellow, Hare asked his employers for a year's leave of absence from his engineering job, only that he might return to work every day and take photographs that would begin to expose what he saw as the relation between "technology and alienation." Somehow, corporate public relations agents saw the project in a positive light and approved it. After only three months of independent work, Hare's investigations were terminated by a suddenly threatened management. During his wanderings in this familiar territory, Hare photographed and interviewed at every level of the corporate hierarchy, ranging from refinery operators, maintenance workers and headquarters key-punch operators, to supervisors and executive engineers. His photographs form a kind of metonymic map of an abstract bureaucratic structure. Each portrait suggests a life and a position. One sees evidence of the elaborately coded privileges and humiliations of autocratically managed large enterprises. An executive inhabits a large office on an upper floor with a plate glass view of San Francisco's financial district. In a corner, a far corner, behind an expensive potted plant, he keeps a small photographic shrine to his wife and kids. Refinery operators, unable to leave their job sites for lunch, eat sandwiches as they stare at walls of gauges. A woman's head is barely visible in a labyrinthine word processing cubicle. Refinery operators sit glumly on a bench while their supervisor lectures them about a failed valve, exhibited prominently in the foreground of the picture.

Hare's photographs demand extended captions. His interviews serve to reveal the subjective aspects of the work experience, something photographs can only suggest indirectly. Interviews allow for a kind of self-authorship that portraiture offers only in an extremely limited and problematic way. The photographer always has the edge; and a moment is, after all, only a moment, and only a *visible* moment at that. Speech allows for critical reflection, for complaints, for the unfolding of personal histories, for the voicing of fears and hopes. Hare was trained as a technocrat and a pragmatist, trained to submit all problems to the logic of an efficiency defined solely in terms of profit. This is hardly a personal attack, but merely a remark on the historical role of the engineering profession under capitalism. Hare brings an engineer's knowledge, coupled with an ethical integration of "fact" and "value," to his critique of the petrochemical industry. And yet he sees in the refinery workers an image of his own, previously unacknowledged, proletarianization. He overcomes the contempt commonly felt by

professional and technical staff for the people who actually run the everyday operations of a large refinery complex. Refineries are increasingly dangerous, both to workers and to the surrounding communities. Under-staffed and poorly maintained, many plants are potential bombs. Pipes wear thin and explode; operators have to contend with doubled and tripled work loads. This crisis situation is evident in Hare's pictures and interview transcripts. A lone worker is photographed in the midst of a large tank-truck loading complex for which he alone is responsible, rather than the normal crew of three. A number of the workers photographed by Hare have since died of cancer. The Richmond, California area, where Hare both works and lives, is a petrochemical center with one of the highest per capita rates of cancer in the country. As a known member of the community and friend, Hare photographs many of the workers in their homes, in private life and retirement. It is among these older, retired workers that he discovers the most variations on the theme of uncompensated injuries and epidemic carcinoma. The younger workers know what awaits them, and talk about their options.

Like Lonidier, Hare has had to protect many of his subjects from the potential consequences of their remarks, from company reprisals. However, he has chosen an altogether different approach to the problems of visual representation, preferring portraiture to a deadpan, clinical style of photography. Lonidier accepts the reified form of visual depiction, and works toward its subversion through storytelling and political analysis. Hare begins with a "humanized" image, but embeds the portrait within a larger frame, within the very midst of a bureaucratic labyrinth and a modern "automated" version of the dark, satanic mill with its routine, its boredom, its sterility and its invisible poisons.

III

I am arguing, then, for an art that documents monopoly capitalism's inability to deliver the conditions of a fully human life, for an art that recalls Benjamin's remark in the *Theses on the Philosophy of History* that "there is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism."¹⁴ Against violence directed at the human body, at the environment, at working people's ability to control their own lives, we need to counterpose an active resistance, simultaneously political and symbolic, to monopoly capitalism's increasing power and arrogance, a resistance aimed ultimately at socialist transformation. A naive faith in both the privileged subjectivity of the artist, at the one extreme, and the fundamental "objectivity" of photographic realism, at the other, can only be overcome in a recognition of cultural work as a *praxis*. As Marx put it:

It is only in a social context that subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and passivity cease to be such antinomies. The resolution of the theoretical

15. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" (1844), *Early Writings*, trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore, New York, 1964, p. 162.

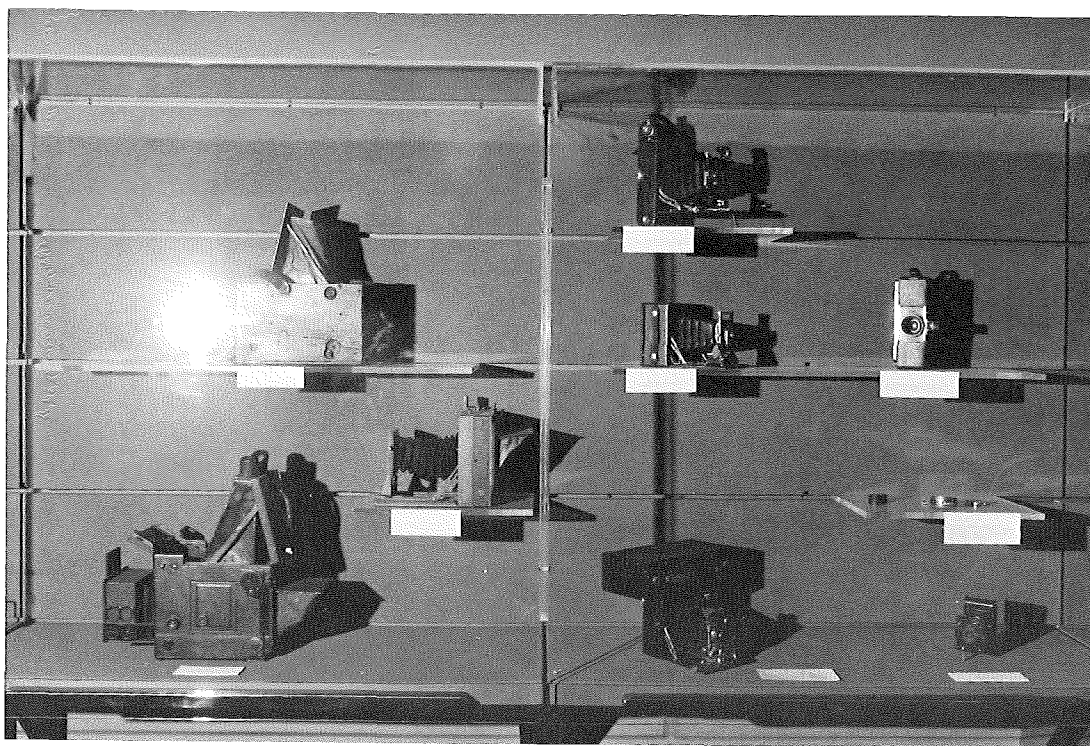
14. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), *Illuminations*, p. 256.

*contradictions is possible only through practical means, only through the practical energy of man.*¹⁵

A didactic and critical representation is a necessary but insufficient condition for the transformation of society. A larger, encompassing praxis is necessary.

1976

1978



Figures 1-2: At the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York — the only major museum devoted entirely to photography and cinema — two historiographic tendencies are evident. The viewer is offered both a technological history and an art history; the cult of the machine and the cult of the artist are celebrated under one ecumenical roof. Photographs by the author, 1978.

1. An earlier, shorter version of this essay was published in the *Australian Photography Conference Papers*, Melbourne, 1980. I am grateful to the editors of *Working Papers on Photography*, Euan McGillvray and Matthew Nickson, for the opportunity to present the preliminary version there.

The Traffic in Photographs

I. Introduction: Between Estheticism and Scientism

How can we work toward an active, critical understanding of the prevailing conventions of representation, particularly those surrounding photography?¹ The discourse that surrounds photography speaks paradoxically of discipline and freedom, of rigorous truths and unleashed pleasures. Here then, at least by virtue of a need to contain the tensions inherent in this paradox, is the site of a certain shell game, a certain dance, even a certain politics. In effect, we are invited to dance between photographic truths and photographic pleasures with very little awareness of the floorboards and muscles that make this seemingly effortless movement possible.

By discourse, then, I mean the forceful play of tacit beliefs and formal conventions that situates us, as social beings, in various responsive and responsible attitudes to the semiotic workings of photography. In itself constrained, determined by, and contributing to “larger” cultural, political, and economic forces, this discourse both legitimates and directs the multiple flows of the traffic in photographs. It quietly manages and constrains our abilities to produce and consume photographic imagery, while often encouraging, especially in its most publicized and glamorous contemporary variants, an apparently limitless semiotic freedom, a timeless dimension of esthetic appreciation. Encoded in academic and “popular” texts, in books, newspapers, magazines, in institutional and commercial displays, in the design of photographic equipment, in schooling, in everyday social rituals, and — through the workings of these contexts — within photographs themselves; this discourse exerts a force that is simultaneously material and symbolic, inextricably linking language and power. Above all, in momentarily isolating this historically specific ideology and practice of representation we shouldn’t forget that it gives concrete form to — thus

lending both truth and pleasure to — other discursively-borne ideologies: of “the family,” of “sexuality,” of “consumption” and “production,” of “government,” of “technology,” of “nature,” of “communications,” of “history,” and so on. Herein lies a major aspect of the affiliation of photography with power. And as in all culture that grows from a system of oppressions, the discourses that carry the greater force in everyday life are those that emanate from power, that give voice to an institutional authority. For us, today, these affirmative and supervisory voices speak primarily for capital, and subordinately for the state. This essay is a practical search for internal inconsistencies, and thus for some of the weaknesses in this linkage of language and power.

Photography is haunted by two chattering ghosts: that of bourgeois science and that of bourgeois art. The first goes on about the truth of appearances, about the world reduced to a positive ensemble of facts, to a constellation of knowable and possessable *objects*. The second specter has the historical mission of apologizing for and redeeming the atrocities committed by the subservient — and more than spectral — hand of science. This second specter offers us a reconstructed *subject* in the luminous person of the artist. Thus, from 1839 onward, affirmative commentaries on photography have engaged in a comic, shuffling dance between technological determinism and auteurism, between faith in the objective powers of the machine and a belief in the subjective, imaginative capabilities of the artist. In persistently arguing for the harmonious coexistence of optical truths and visual pleasures, in yoking a positivist scientism with a romantic metaphysics, photographic discourse has attempted to bridge the philosophical and institutional separation of scientific and artistic practices that has characterized bourgeois society from the late eighteenth century onward. The defenders of photography have both confirmed and rebelled against the Kantian cleavage of epistemology and esthetics; some argue for truth, some for pleasure, and most for both, usually out of opposite sides of the mouth. (And a third voice, usually affiliated with liberalism, sporadically argues for an ethical dimension to photographic meaning. This argument attempts to fuse the separated spheres of fact and value, to graft a usually reformist morality onto empiricism.) This philosophical shell game is evidence of a sustained crisis at the very center of bourgeois culture, a crisis rooted in the emergence of science and technology as seemingly autonomous productive forces. Bourgeois culture has had to contend with the threat and the promise of the machine, which it continues to both resist and embrace.² The fragmentary and mechanically derived photographic image is central to this attitude of crisis and ambivalence; the embracing issue is the nature of work and creativity under capitalism. Above all else, the ideological force of photographic art in modern society may lie in the apparent reconciliation of human creative energies with a scientifically guided process of mechanization, suggesting that despite the modern

2. In 1790, Kant separates knowledge and pleasure in a way that fully anticipates the bastard status of photography: “If art which is adequate to the *cognition* of a possible object performs the actions requisite therefore merely in order to make it actual, it is mechanical art; but if it has as its immediate design the feeling of pleasure, it is called *aesthetical* art.” (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. J. H. Bernard, New York, 1951, p. 148.)

A number of texts seems relevant to the question of the photographer as mere “appendage to the machine.” Of

specific importance is Bernard Edelman's *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law*, London, 1979. Less directly related, but valuable are Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York, 1974, Alfred Sohn-Rethel's *Intellectual and Manual Labor*, London, 1978, and an essay by Raymond Williams, “The Romantic Artist,” in *Culture and Society*, New York, 1958, pp. 30-48.

3. I am grateful to Sally Stein for discussions about the relationship between scientific management and the development of a mechanized visual culture in the early twentieth century, and especially for showing me an unpublished essay written in 1980 on this issue, “The Graphic Ordering of Desire: Modernization of *The Ladies' Home Journal*, 1914-1939.” Her criticisms and support were very important. Also, Bruce Kaiper deserves thanks for a lucid essay, “The Human Object and its Capitalist Image,” *Left Curve*, No. 5, 1976, pp. 40-60, and for a number of conversations on this subject.

industrial division of labor, and specifically despite the industrialization of cultural work, despite the historical obsolescence, marginalization and degradation of artisanal and manual modes of representation, the category of the artist lives on in the exercise of a *purely mental*, imaginative command over the camera.³

But during the second half of the nineteenth century, a fundamental tension developed between uses of photography that fulfill a bourgeois conception of the *self* and uses that seek to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*. Thus every work of photographic art has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the archives of the police. To the extent that bourgeois society depends on the systematic defense of property relations, to the extent that the legal basis of the self lies in property rights, every proper portrait of a “man of genius” made by a “man of genius” has its counterpart in a mug shot. Both attempts are motivated by an uneasy belief in the category of the individual. Thus also, every romantic landscape finds its deadly echo in the aerial view of a targeted terrain. And to the extent that modern sexuality has been invented and channeled by organized medicine, every eroticized view of the body bears a covert relation to the clinical depiction of anatomy.

With the rise of the modern social sciences, a regularized flow of symbolic and material power is engineered between fully-human subject and less-than-fully-human object along vectors of race, sex, and class. The social-scientistic appropriation of photography led to a genre I would call *instrumental realism*, representational projects devoted to new techniques of social diagnosis and control, to the systematic naming, categorization, and isolation of an otherness thought to be determined by biology and manifested through the “language” of the body itself. Early anthropological, criminological and psychiatric photography, as well as motion-study photography used somewhat later in the scientific analysis and management of the labor process, constitute ambitious attempts to link optical empiricism with abstract, statistical truth, to move from the specificity of the body to abstract, mathematical laws of human nature. Thus photography was hitched to the locomotive of positivism.

But consider for a moment the symbolist cult of metaphor, so central to the rhetoric of emergent avant-garde art photography in the United States in the first quarter of this century. In its attempt to establish the free-floating metaphorical play, or equivalence, of signifiers, this symbolist-influenced photography was fundamentally reactive, the outcome of a desire to seize a small area of creative autonomy from a tainted, instrumentalized medium, a medium that had demonstrated repeatedly its complicity with the forces of industrialism. Thus the free play of metaphorical associations was implicitly contrasted to the slavish metonymy of both instrumental realism and the sentimental realism of late nineteenth-century family photography. With symbolism the ultimate goal of abstraction also looms, but in metaphysical and spiritualist rather than positivist guise. But both modern science and modernist art end up wor-

shipping in floating cathedrals of formal, abstract, mathematical relations and "laws." Perhaps the fundamental question to be asked is whether or not traditional photographic representation, whether symbolist or realist in its dominant formal rhetoric, can transcend the pervasive logic of the commodity form, the exchange abstraction that haunts the culture of capitalism. Despite its origins in a radical refusal of instrumental meaning, symbolism appears to have been absorbed by mass culture, enlisted in the spectacle that gives imaginary flesh to the abstract regime of commodity exchange.⁴

No theory of photography can fail to deal with the hidden unity of these extremes of photographic practice without lapsing into mere cultural promotion, into the intellectual background-music that welcomes photography into the shopping mall of a bureaucratically administered high culture that has, in the late capitalist period, become increasingly indistinguishable from mass culture in its structural dependence on forms of publicity and stardom. The goals of a critical theory of photography ought, ultimately, to involve the practical, to help point the way to a radical, reinvented cultural practice. Other more powerful challenges to the order of monopoly capitalism need to be discovered and invented; resistances that unite culture and politics. Symbolic revolts are not enough, nor is a purely instrumental conception of politics. This essay is an attempt to pose questions that I take to be only preliminary, but necessary, steps in that direction.

II. Universal Language

It goes almost without saying that photography emerged and proliferated as a mode of communication within the larger context of a developing capitalist *world order*. No previous economy constituted a world order in the same sense. As an inherently expansionist economic system, capitalism seeks ultimately to unify the globe in a single system of commodity production and exchange. Even tribal and feudal economies at the periphery of the capitalist system are drastically transformed by the pressures exerted from the aggressive centers of finance and trade. These forces cause local economies and cultures to lose much of their self-sufficiency, their manner of being tied by necessity and tradition to a specific local ecology. This process of global colonization, initially demanding the outright conquest, extermination and pacification of native peoples, began in earnest in the sixteenth century, a period of expanding mercantile capitalism. In the late twentieth century this process continues in a fashion more intensive than extensive, as modern capitalism encounters national political insurrections throughout the colonized world and attempts to fortify its position against a crisis that is simultaneously political, economic, and ecological, a crisis that is internal as well as external. Despite these changes, a common logic of capital accumulation links, for example, the European slave trade in West Africa in the seventeenth and

4. For an earlier discussion of the relation between symbolist and realist photography see my "On the Invention of Photographic Meaning" in this volume.

5. A useful introduction to some of the cultural implications of an international capitalist economy can be found in Samir Amin's "In Praise of Socialism," in *Imperialism and Unequal Development*, New York, 1977, pp. 73-85. In this connection, a recent, and perhaps sardonic remark by Harold Rosenberg comes to mind: "Today, all modes of visual excitation, from Benin idols to East Indian chintz, are both contemporaneous and American." (Harold Rosenberg, "The Problem of Reality," in *American Civilization: A Portrait from the 20th Century*, ed. by Daniel J. Boorstin, London, 1972, p. 305.)

eighteenth centuries to the late twentieth-century electronics sweatshops operated by American multinationals in Singapore and Malaysia. And today, even established as well as recently insurgent socialist economies are increasingly forced to adjust to the pressures of a global system of currency dominated by the large multinational enterprises of the West.⁵

What are we to make then, of the oft-repeated claim that photography constitutes a "universal language?" Almost from 1839 to the present, this honorific has been expansively and repetitively voiced by photographers, intellectuals, journalists, cultural impresarios and advertising copy writers. Need I even cite examples? But the very ubiquity of this cliché has lent it a commonsensical armor that deflects serious critical questions. The "universal language" myth seems so central, so full of social implications, that I'd like to trace the argument as it surfaced and resurfaced at three different historical conjunctures.

An initial qualification seems important here. The claim for semantic universality depends on a more fundamental conceit: the belief that photography constitutes a language in its own right. But photography is *not* an independent or autonomous language system, but depends on larger discursive conditions, invariably including those established by the system of verbal-written language. Photographic meaning is always a hybrid construction, the outcome of an interplay of iconic, graphic, and narrative conventions. Despite a certain fugitive moment of semantic and formal autonomy — the Holy Grail of most modernist analytic criticism — the photograph is invariably accompanied by, and situated within, an overt or covert *text*. Even at the level of the artificially "isolated" image, photographic signification is exercised in terms of pictorial conventions that are never "purely" photographic. After all, the dominant spatial code in the Western pictorial tradition is still that of linear perspective, institutionalized in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Having made this point, only in passing and only too briefly, suppose we examine what is necessarily the dependent claim, a claim grounded in the dubious conception of a "photographic language."

My first example consists of two texts that constituted part of the initial euphoric chorus that welcomed and promoted the invention of photography in 1839. In reading these, we'll move "backwards," as it were, from the frontiers of photography's early proliferation to the ceremonial site of invention, tracing a kind of reverse geographical movement within the same period of emergence.

Early in 1840, a glowing newspaper account of the daguerreotype (mistranslated understandably enough as the "daguerreolite") was published in Cincinnati, Ohio. Cincinnati was a busy center for river-borne shipping in what was then the western United States, a city that would soon support one of the more ornate and culturally pretentious of American photographic por-

trait establishments, Ball's Daguerrian Gallery of the West.⁶ Here then is a fragment of what was undoubtedly the first local announcement of the novel invention which was soon to blossom into the very embodiment of Culture:

*Its perfection is unapproachable by human hand and its truth raises it above all language, painting or poetry. It is the first universal language addressing itself to all who possess vision, and in characters alike understood in the courts of civilization and the hut of the savage. The pictorial language of Mexico, the hieroglyphics of Egypt are now superseded by reality.*⁷

I find it striking that this account glides from the initial trumpeting of a triumph over "all language," presumably including all previous European cultural achievements, to the celebration of a victorious encounter with "primitive" and archeologically remote pictographic conventions, rendering these already extinct languages rather redundantly "obsolete." This optimistic hymn to progress conceals a fear of the past. For the unconscious that resides within this text, dead languages and cultures may well be pregnant with the threat of rebirth. Like zombies, they must be killed again, and embalmed by a "more perfect union" of sign and referent, a union that delivers "reality" itself without the mediation of hand or tongue. This new mechanical language, by its very closeness to nature, will speak in civilizing tones to previously unteachable "savages." Behind the rhetoric of technologically derived egalitarianism lurks a vision of the relentless imposition of a new pedagogical power.

Consider also a related passage from one of the central ideological documents of the early history of photography, the report on the daguerreotype by the physicist and left-republican representative François Arago addressed to his colleagues in the French Chamber of Deputies. This report was published along with the texts of related speeches by the chemist Gay-Lussac and the Interior Minister Dûchatel in the numerous editions in many languages of Daguerre's instruction manual. As is well known, Arago argued for the award of a state pension to Daguerre for his "work of genius;" this purchase would then be offered "generously to the entire world." Not without a certain amount of manoeuvring (involving the covert shunting aside of photographic research by Hippolyte Bayard and the more overt down-playing of Nicéphore Niépce's contribution to the Niépce-Daguerre collaboration), Arago established the originality of Daguerre's invention.⁸ Arago also emphasized the extraordinary efficiency of the invention — its capacity to accelerate the process of representation — and the demonstrable utility of the new medium for both art and science. Thus the report's principal ideological service was to fuse the authority of the state with that of the individual author — the individuated *subject* of invention. But while genius and the parliamentary-monarchic state bureaucracy of Louis-Phillipe are brought together within the larger ideological context of a unified technical and

6. See Richard Rudisill, *Mirror Image: The Influence of the Daguerreotype on American Society*, Albuquerque, 1971, p. 201.

7. "The Daguerreolite," *The Daily Chronicle* (Cincinnati), Vol. I, No. 38, January 17, 1840, p. 2, quoted in Rudisill, p. 54.

8. See Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, *L. J. M. Daguerre: The History of the Diorama and the Daguerreotype*, New York, 1968, pp. 88, 99.

9. François Arago, "Report," in Josef Maria Eder, *History of Photography*, trans. Edward Epstean, New York, 1945, pp. 235. The earliest English translation of this address appears in L. J. M. Daguerre, *An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Daguerreotype and the Diorama*, London, 1839.

10. Arago, "Report," pp. 234-235.

11. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, 1978.

cultural progressivism, the report also touches on France's colonial enterprises and specifically upon the archival chores of the "zealous and famous scholars and artists attached to the army of the Orient."⁹ Here is the earliest written fantasy of a collision between photography and hieroglyphics, a fantasy that resurfaced six months later in Ohio:

While these pictures are exhibited to you, everyone will imagine the extraordinary advantages which could have been derived from so exact and rapid a means of reproduction during the expedition to Egypt; everybody will realize that had we had photography in 1798 we would possess today faithful pictorial records of that which the learned world is forever deprived by the greed of the Arabs and the vandalism of certain travelers.

*To copy the millions of hieroglyphics which cover even the exterior of the great monuments of Thebes, Memphis, Karnak, and others would require decades of time and legions of draughtsmen. By daguerreotype one person would suffice to accomplish this immense work successfully. . . . These designs will excel the works of the most accomplished painters, in fidelity of detail and true reproduction of atmosphere. Since the invention follows the laws of geometry, it will be possible to re-establish with the aid of a small number of given factors the exact size of the highest points of the most inaccessible structures.*¹⁰

In this rather marked example of what Edward Said has termed "Orientalist" discourse, a "learned" Occident colonizes an East that either always has lacked or has lost all memory of learning.¹¹ A seemingly neutral, mathematical objectivism retrieves, measures and preserves the artifacts of an Orient that has "greedily" squandered its own heritage. In a sense, Arago's argument here is overdetermined: France, a most civilized nation, a nation aware of its historical mission, must not fail to preserve and nurture its own inventions. In effect, Arago's speech conflates photography-as-an-end and photography-as-a-means. This should not be at all surprising, given the powerful tendency of bourgeois thought to collapse all teleology into the sheer, ponderous immanence of technological development. Rational progress becomes a matter of the increasingly quantitative refinement of technical means; the only positive transformations are those that stem from orderly technical innovations. Hence Arago's emphasis on the conquest of vandalism, greed and ignorance through speed and the laws of geometry.

In a very different historical context — that of the last crisis-ridden years of Weimar Germany — a text appeared that is reminiscent of both Arago's refined promotion and the hyperbolic newspaper prophecy from Ohio. August Sander, that rigorously and comprehensively sociologist portraitist of the German people, delivered a radio talk in 1931 entitled "Photography as a Universal Language." The talk, which ran fifth in a series by Sander, stresses that a liberal, enlightened, and even socially-critical pedagogy might be achieved by the proper use of photographic means. Thus Sander's emphasis is less on the pictorial archive anticipated by

Arago in 1839 than on a global mode of communication that would hurdle barriers of illiteracy and language difference. But at the same time, Sander echoes the scientific notions of photographic truth that made their initial authoritative appearance in Arago's report:

Today with photography we can communicate our thoughts, conceptions, and realities, to all the people on the earth; if we add the date of the year we have the power to fix the history of the world. . . .

*Even the most isolated Bushman could understand a photograph of the heavens — whether it showed the sun or the moon or the constellations. In biology, in the animal and plant world, the photograph as picture language can communicate without the help of sound. But the field in which photography has so great a power of expression that language can never approach it, is physiognomy. . . .*¹²

Perhaps it is understandable that in his enthusiasm for photographic enlightenment Sander led his unseen radio audience to believe that a Copernican cosmology and a mechanically rendered Albertian perspective might constitute transhistorical and transcultural discourses: photography could deliver the heliocentric and perspectival truths of the Renaissance to any human viewer.

Further, Sander describes photography as the truth vehicle for an eclectic array of disciplines: not only astronomy, but history, biology, zoology, botany, physiognomy (and clearly the list is not meant to be exhaustive). Two paragraphs later, his text seeks to name the source of the encyclopedic power to convey virtually all the world's knowledges:

*No language on earth speaks as comprehensively as photography, always providing that we follow the chemical and optic and physical path to demonstrable truth, and understand physiognomy. Of course you have to have decided whether you will serve culture or the marketplace.*¹³

In opposing photographic truth to commercial values, and in regarding photography as "a special discipline with special laws and its own special language,"¹⁴ Sander is assuming an uncompromisingly modernist stance. This position is not without its contradictions. Thus, on the one hand Sander claims that photography constitutes a "language" that is both autonomous and universal; on the other, photography is subsumed within the logical order of the natural sciences. The "laws" that are "special" to photography turn out to be those of chemistry and optics. From this subordinate position photography functions as the vehicle for a scientific pedagogy. For Arago, photography is a means of aggressively acquiring the world's truth; for Sander, photography benignly disseminates these truths to a global audience. Although the emphasis in the first instance is on acquisition, and in the second on distribution, both projects are fundamentally rooted in a shared epistemology. This epistemology combines a faith in the universality of the natural sciences, and a belief in the transparency of representation.



Figure 3: August Sander, *Untitled* (Peasant Couple from the Leuschied), 1931. From series *Menschen und Landschaften* (People and Landscapes).

12. August Sander, "Photography as a Universal Language," trans. Anne Halley, *Massachusetts Review*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, Winter 1978, pp. 674-675.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 675.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 679.



Figure 4: August Sander, *Landowner and Wife, Cologne/Kreil*, c. 1925.

15. Alfred Döblin, "About Faces, Portraits, and Their Reality: Introduction to August Sander, *Antlitz der Zeit*" (1929), in *Germany: The New Photography, 1927-33*, ed. David Mellor, London, 1978, p. 58.

16. Auguste Comte, *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830-1842) in *Auguste Comte and Positivism: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gertrud Lenzer, New York, 1975. Lenzer's introduction is especially valuable.

17. Johann Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, trans. Henry Hunter, London, 1792, Vol. I, preface, n.p. This is the first English translation of *Physiognomische Fragmente, Zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, Leipzig and Winterthur, 1775-1778.

For Sander, physiognomy was perhaps the highest of the human sciences, which are in turn merely extensions of natural-scientific method. Physiognomic empiricism serves as the basis for what the novelist and physician Alfred Döblin, in his preface to Sander's *Antlitz der Zeit* described as a project methodologically analogous to medical science, thereby collapsing history and sociology into social anatomy:

*You have in front of you a kind of cultural history, better, sociology of the last 30 years. How to write sociology without writing, but presenting photographs instead, photographs of faces and not national costumes, this is what the photographer accomplished with his eyes, his mind, his observations, his knowledge and last but not least his considerable photographic ability. Only through studying comparative anatomy can we come to an understanding of nature and the history of the internal organs. In the same way this photographer has practiced comparative anatomy and therefore found a scientific point of view beyond the conventional photographer.*¹⁵

The echoes of nineteenth-century positivism and its Enlightenment antecedents are deafening here, as they are in Sander's own implicit hierarchy of knowledge. The grim master-voice is that of Auguste Comte's systematic and profoundly influential effort to invent sociology (or "social physics," as he initially labeled the new discipline) on the model of the physical sciences, in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* of 1830-1842.¹⁶

Physiognomy predates and partially anticipates positivism. A number of social scientific disciplines absorbed physiognomic method as a means of implementing positivist theory during the nineteenth century. This practice continued into the twentieth century and, despite a certain decline in scientific legitimacy, took on an especially charged aspect in the social environment of Weimar Germany. Sander shared the then still common belief — which dated back at least as far as Johann Caspar Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* of 1775-1778 — that the body, and especially the face and head, bore the outward *signs* of inner character. Lavater himself had first suggested that this "original language of Nature, written on the face of Man" could be deciphered by a rigorous physiognomic *science*.¹⁷ This "science" proceeded by means of an analytic isolation of the anatomic features of the head and face — forehead, eyes, ears, nose, chin, and so on — and the assignment of a significance to each. "Character" was judged through a concatenation of these readings. Of course Sander never proffered so rigorous a mode of physiognomic interpretation for his photographs. He never suggested that each fragment of facial anatomy be isolated through the kind of pictorial dissection sketched by Lavater and practiced by his myriad disciples. I suspect Sander wanted to envelop his project in the legitimating aura of science without violating the esthetic coherence and semantic ambiguity of the traditional portrait form. Despite his scientific rhetoric, his portraits never achieve the "precision" and "exactitude" so desired

by physiognomists of all stripes. Sander's commitment was, in effect, to a sociologically extended variant of formal portraiture. His scientism is revealed in the ensemble, in the attempt to delineate a social anatomy. More than anything else, physiognomy served as a telling *metaphor* for this project.

The historical trajectories of physiognomy, and of the related practices of phrenology and anthropometrics, are extremely complicated and are consistently interwoven with the history of photographic portraiture. And as was the case with photography, these disciplines gave rise to the same contradictory but connected rationales. These techniques for reading the body's signs seemed to promise both egalitarian and authoritarian results. At the one extreme, the more liberal apologetic promoted the cultivation of a common human understanding of the language of the body: all of humanity was to be both subject and object of this new egalitarian discourse. At the other extreme — and this was certainly the dominant tendency in actual social practice — a specialized way of knowledge was opening harnessed to the new strategies of social channeling and control that characterized the mental asylum, the penitentiary, and eventually, the factory employment office. Unlike the egalitarian mode, these latter projects drew an unmistakable line between the professional reader of the body's signs — the psychiatrist, physiologist, criminologist, or industrial psychologist — and the “diseased,” “deviant,” or “biologically inferior” object of cure, reform, or discipline.

August Sander stood to the liberal side of positivism in his faith in a universal pedagogy. Yet like positivists in general, he was insensitive to the *epistemological* differences between peoples and cultures. Difference would seem to exist only on the surface; all peoples share the same modes of perception and cognition, as well as the same natural bodily codes of expression. For nineteenth century positivism, anthropological difference became quantitative rather than qualitative. This reduction opened the door to one of the principle justifications of social Darwinism. Inferiority could presumably be measured and located on a continuous calibrated scale. Armed with calipers, scalpel, and camera, scientists sought to prove the absence of a governing intellect in criminals, the insane, women, workers, and nonwhite people.¹⁸ Here again, one lineage stretches back beyond positivism and social Darwinism to the benign figure of Lavater who proclaimed both the “universality of physiognomic discernments” and defined a “human nature” fundamentally constituted by a variable mixture of “animal, moral, and intellectual life.”¹⁹

But Sander, in contrast to his nineteenth-century predecessors, refused to link his belief in physiognomic science to biological determinism. He organized his portraiture in terms of a social, rather than a racial, typology. As Anne Halley has noted in a perceptive essay on the photographer, herein lay the most immediate difference between Sander's physiognomic project and that of Nazi

18. I am preparing an essay which deals with the relation between physiognomy and instrumental realism in much greater detail. A great deal of this work revolves around a study of the two principal schools of late nineteenth century European criminology, the Positivist School of the Italian forensic psychiatrist Cesare Lombroso and the Statistical School of the French police official Alphonse Bertillon. Lombroso advanced the profoundly racist and long-lived notion of an atavistic criminal *type*, while Bertillon, applying the social statistics developed by the Belgian statistician Adolphe Quételet in the 1820s and 1830s, sought to absolutely identify the criminal “individuality.” Bertillon's method of police identification, which linked a series of anthropometric measurements to a photographic *portrait-parlé* or “speaking likeness,” was the first “scientific” system of police intelligence. Perhaps the most striking example of the mathematicism inherent in these searches for the absolute,

objective truth of the incarcerated body is found, not in the criminological literature of the nineteenth century, but in the related field of psychiatric medicine.

I would like to cite one example to emphasize the nature of this thinking. Hugh Welch Diamond, a minor English psychiatrist and founding member of the genteel Photographic Society, attempted to use photographic portraits of patients in the Surrey County Women's Asylum for empirical research, therapy, and surveillance of the inmate population. Diamond read a paper on his work to the Royal Society in 1856: “The photographer, on the other hand, needs in many cases no aid from any language of his own, but prefers rather to listen, with the pictures before him, to the silent but telling language of nature . . . the picture speaks for itself with the most marked precision and indicates the *exact* point which has been reached in the *scale* of unhappiness between the first sensation and its utmost height.” (Italics mine. Hugh W. Diamond, “On the Application of Photography to the Physiognomic and Mental Phenomena of Insanity,” in *The Face of Madness: Hugh W. Diamond and the Origin of Psychiatric Photography*, ed. Sander L. Gilman, Secaucus, 1977, p. 19.)

I have found the work of Michel Foucault particularly valuable in considering these issues, especially his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York, 1977. My interest in this area began in conversations with Martha Rosler; her video “opera” *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained* (1976) is an exemplary study of the power of measurement science over the body, with a feminist inflection that is absent in the work of Foucault.

19. Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, p. 13.

20. Anne Halley, “August Sander,” *Massachusetts Review*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, Winter 1978, pp. 663-673. See also Robert Kramer, “Historical Commentary,” in *August Sander: Photographs of an Epoch*, Philadelphia, 1980, pp. 11-38, for a discussion of Sander's relation to physiognomic traditions.

21. Fascist ideology is overtly metaphysical in character, depending in large measure on cults of racial and national superiority and on the ostentatious display of charismatic authority. Nevertheless, the actual functioning of the fascist corporate state demands the sub rosa exercise of a bureaucratic rationalism that is profoundly rooted in positivist notions of the commanding role of science and of technical elites. Nazi ideologues felt the need, in fact, to scientifically legitimate the *Führer* cult. One text in particular is relevant to our discussion of Sander and physiognomy. Alfred Richter's *Unser Führer im Lichte der Rassenfrage und Charakterologie*, Leipzig, 1933, sought to demonstrate the racial ideality and innate political genius of Adolf Hitler and the host of top party officials by means of handsomely-lit formal portraits that were accompanied by flattering physiognomical analyses. This research project-cum-souvenir album provides unintended evidence that the seemingly charismatic authority of the fascist leader has the quality of an apparition, an Oz-like aspect that requires amplification through the media and legitimation through an appeal to the larger, abstract authority of Science. In this light, Hitler shines as the embodiment of a racial principle. In its assault on parliamentary pluralism, fascist government portrays itself not only as a means of national salvation, but as the organic *expression* of a nonrational, biologically-driven will to domination.

22. Sander, “Photography as a Universal Language,” p. 678.

23. Walter Benjamin (in “A Short History of Photography”

race “theorists” like Hans F. K. Günther who deployed physiognomic readings of photographic portraits to establish both the biological superiority of the Nordic “race” and the categorical otherness of the Jews.²⁰ The very universalism of Sander's argument for photographic and physiognomic truth may well have been an indirect and somewhat naive attempt to respond to the racial particularism of the Nazis, which “scientifically” legitimated genocide and imperialism.

The conflict between Sander and National Socialist *Rassentheorie*, which culminated in the Nazi's destruction of the plates for *Antlitz der Zeit* in 1934, is well remembered and celebrated by liberal historians of photography. One is tempted to emphasize a contrast between Sander's “good” physiognomic science and the “bad” physiognomic science of Günther and his ilk, without challenging the positivist underpinnings of both projects. That is, what is less apparent is that Sander, in his “scientific” liberalism, shared aspects of the same general positivist outlook that was incorporated into the fascist project of domination. But in this, Sander was little different from other social democrats of his time. The larger questions which loom here concern the continuities between fascist, liberal capitalist, social democratic, and bureaucratic socialist governments as modes of administration which subject social life to the authority of an institutionalized scientific expertise.²¹

The politics of social democracy, to which Sander subscribed, demand that government be legitimated on the basis of formal representation. Despite the sense of impending collapse, of crisis-level unemployment and imminent world war conveyed by Sander in his radio speech of 1931, he sustains a curiously inflected faith in the *representativeness* of bourgeois parliamentary government:

*The historical image will become even clearer if we join together pictures typical of the many different groups that make up human society. For instance, we might consider a nation's parliament. If we began with the Right Wing and moved across the individual types to the farthest Left, we would already have a partial physiognomic image of the nation.*²²

Just as a picture stands for its referent, so parliament stands for a nation. In effect, Sander regards parliament as a picture in itself, a synecdochic sample of the national whole. This conflation of the mythologies of pictorial and political representation may well be fundamental to the public discourse of liberalism. Sander, unlike Bertolt Brecht or the left-wing photomontagist John Heartfield, believed that political relations were evident on the surface of things.²³ Political revelation was a matter of careful sampling for Sander, his project shares the logic of the opinion poll. In this, Sander stands in the mainstream of liberal thinking on the nature of journalism and social documentation; he shares both the epistemology and the politics that accompany bourgeois realism. The deceptively clear waters of this mainstream flow from the confluence of two deep ideological currents. One current defends sci-

ence as the privileged *representation* of the real, as the ultimate source of social truth. The other current defends parliamentary politics as the *representation* of a pluralistic popular desire, as the ultimate source of social good.

Despite Sander's tendency to collapse politics into a physiognomic typology, he never loses sight of the political arena as one of conflict and struggle. And yet, viewed as a whole, Sander's compendium of portraits from the Weimar period and before possess a haunting — and ideologically limiting — synchronicity for the contemporary viewer. One witnesses a kind of false stasis, the appearance of a tense structural equilibrium of social forces. Today, Sander's project suggests a neatly arranged chessboard that was about to be dashed to the floor by brown-shirted thugs. But despite Sander's and Döblin's claims to the contrary, this project was not then and is not now an adequate reading of German social history.

But what of an even more ambitious photographic project, one which managed not only to freeze social life, but also to render it invisible? I am thinking here of that celebrated event in American postwar culture, the exhibition *The Family of Man*. Almost thirty years after Sander's radio talk, the photographer Edward Steichen, who was director of the photography department at the Museum of Modern Art, voiced similarly catholic sentiments in an article published in *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Despite the erudite forum, the argument is simplistic, much more so than anything Sander ever claimed:

*Long before the birth of a word language the caveman communicated by visual images. The invention of photography gave visual communication its most simple, direct, universal language.*²⁴

Steichen went on to tout the success of his Museum of Modern Art exhibition, *The Family of Man*, which by 1960 had been seen by "some seven million people in the twenty-eight countries." He continued, introducing a crude tautological psychologism into his view of photographic discourse:

*The audiences not only understand this visual presentation, they also participate in it, and identify themselves with the images, as if in corroboration of the words of a Japanese poet, 'when you look into a mirror, you do not see your reflection, your reflection sees you.'*²⁵

Steichen, in this moment of fondness for Zen wisdom, understandably neglected to mention that the Japanese recipients of the exhibition insisted on the inclusion of a large photographic mural depicting the victims of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, thus resisting the ahistoricity of the photo essay's argument.

The Family of Man, first exhibited in 1955, may well be the epitome of American Cold War liberalism, with Steichen playing cultural attaché to Adlai Stevenson, the would-be good cop of U.S. foreign policy, promoting a benign view of an American world

[1931], trans. Stanley Mitchell, *Screen*, Vol. 13, Spring 1972, p. 24) quotes a very explicit and often cited statement by Brecht in this regard: "For, says Brecht, the situation is 'complicated by the fact that less than at any time does a simple reproduction of reality tell us anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or GEC yields almost nothing about these institutions. Reality proper has slipped into the functional. The reification of human relationships, the factory, let's say, no longer reveals these relationships. Therefore something has actually to be constructed, something artificial, something set up.' "

One could argue that even the *assemblage* of portraits pursued by Sander merely reproduces the logic of assigned individual places, and thus of reification.

24. Edward Steichen, "On Photography," *Daedalus*, Vol. 42, pp. 136-137, in Nathan Lyons, ed., *Photographers on Photography*, Englewood Cliffs, 1966, p. 107.

25. Ibid., p. 107.

26. Nelson Rockefeller, "Preview Address: 'The Family of Man,'" *U.S. Camera* 1956, ed. Tom Maloney, New York, 1955, p. 18. I am grateful to Alex Sweetman for calling my attention to this article.

order stabilized by the rule of international law. *The Family of Man* universalizes the bourgeois nuclear family, suggesting a globalized, utopian family album, a family romance imposed on every corner of the earth. The family serves as a metaphor also for a system of international discipline and harmony. In the foreign showings of the exhibition, arranged by the United States Information Agency and co-sponsoring corporations like Coca-Cola, the discourse was explicitly that of American multinational capital and government — the new global management team — cloaked in the familiar and musty garb of patriarchy. Nelson Rockefeller, who had served as president of the MoMA Board of Trustees between 1946 and 1953, delivered a preview address that is revealing in terms of its own father-fixation.

Rockefeller began his remarks in an appropriately internationalist vein, suggesting that the exhibition created "a sense of kinship with all mankind." He went on:

*There is a second message to be read from this profession of Edward Steichen's faith. It demonstrates that the essential unity of human experience, attitude and emotion are perfectly communicable through the medium of pictures. The solicitous eye of the Bantu father, resting upon the son who is learning to throw his primitive spear in search of food, is the eye of every father, whether in Montreal, Paris, or in Tokyo.*²⁶

For Rockefeller, social life begins with fathers teaching sons to survive in a Hobbesian world; all authority can be metaphorically equated with this primary relationship.

A close textual reading of *The Family of Man* would indicate that the exhibition moves from the celebration of patriarchal authority — which finds its highest embodiment in the United Nations — to the final construction of an imaginary utopia that resembles nothing so much as a protracted state of infantile, pre-Oedipal bliss. The best-selling book version of the exhibition ends with the following sequence. First, there appears an array of portraits of elderly couples, mostly peasants or farmers from Sicily, Canada, China, Holland, and the United States. The glaring exception in regard to class is a Sander portrait of a wealthy German landowner and his wife. Each picture is captioned with the repeated line from Ovid, "We two form a multitude." From these presumably archetypal parent-figures we turn the page to find a large photograph of the United Nations General Assembly, accompanied by the opening phrases of the U.N. Charter. The next page offers a woman's lower body, bedecked in flowers and standing in water. The following five pages contain smaller photographs of children at play throughout the world, ending with W. Eugene Smith's famous photograph of his son and daughter walking from darkness into light in a garden. The final photograph in the book is quite literally a depiction of the oceanic state, a picture by Cedric Wright of churning surf.

A case could also be made for viewing *The Family of Man* as a more or less unintentional popularization of the then-dominant

school of American sociology, Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism. Parsons' writings on the family celebrate the modern nuclear family as the most advanced and efficient of familial forms, principally because the nuclear family establishes a clearcut division of male and female roles. The male function, in this view, is primarily "instrumental" and oriented toward achievement in the public sphere. The female function is primarily "expressive" and restricted to the domestic sphere. Although *The Family of Man* exhibits a great deal of nostalgia for the extended family engaged in self-sufficient agrarian production, the overall flow of the exhibition's loosely knit narrative traces a generalized family biography that adheres to the nuclear model.²⁷

The familialism of *The Family of Man* functions both metaphorically and in a quite specific, literal fashion as well. For audiences in the advanced capitalist countries, and particularly in the United States, the celebration of the familial sphere as the exclusive arena of all desire and pleasure served to legitimate a family-based consumerism. If nothing else, *The Family of Man* was a massive promotion for family photography, as well as a celebration of the power of the mass media to represent the whole world in familiar and intimate forms.²⁸

The Family of Man, originating at the Museum of Modern Art, but utilizing a mode of architecturally monumentalized photo-essayistic showmanship, occupies a problematic but ideologically convenient middle position between the conventions of high modernism and those of mass culture. The modernist category of the solitary author was preserved, but at the level of editorship. The exhibition simultaneously suggested a family album, a juried show for photo hobbyists, an apotheosis of *Life Magazine*, and the *magnum opus* in Steichen's illustrious career.

A lot more could be said about *The Family of Man*, particularly about its relation to the domestic sexual politics of the Cold War and about its exemplary relation to the changing conventions of advertising and mass-circulation picture magazines in the same period. This will have to wait. My main point here is that *The Family of Man*, more than any other single photographic project, was a massive and ostentatious bureaucratic attempt to *universalize* photographic discourse.

Five hundred and three pictures taken by 273 photographers in 68 countries were chosen from 2 million solicited submissions and organized by a single, illustrious editorial authority into a show that was seen by 9 million citizens in 69 countries in 85 separate exhibitions, and into a book that sold at least 4 million copies by 1978 — or so go the statistics that pervade all accounts of the exhibition. The exhibition claims to fuse universal subject and universal object in a single moment of visual truth and visual pleasure, a single moment of blissful identity. But this dream rings hollow, especially when we come across the following oxymoronic construction in Carl Sandburg's prologue to the book version of the

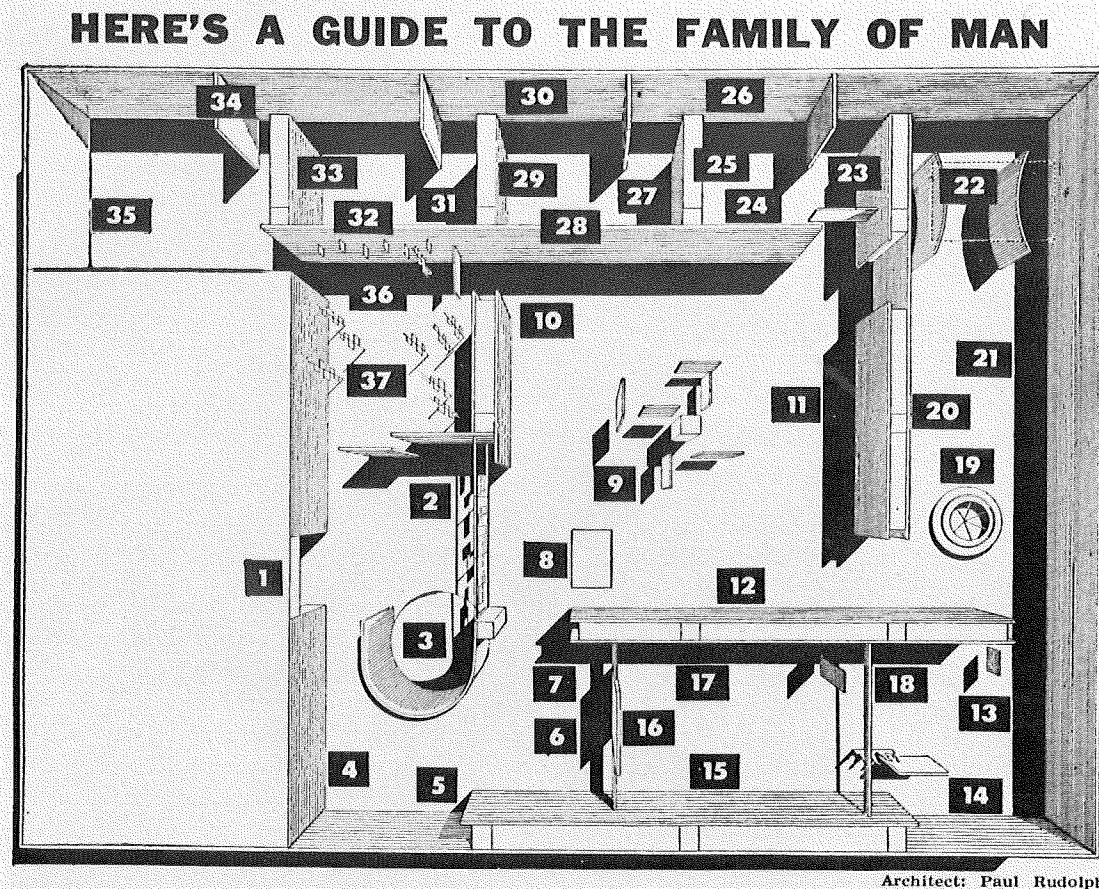
27. See Talcott Parsons et al., *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*, New York, 1955, and the critique provided in Mark Poster, *Critical Theory of the Family*, New York, 1978, pp. 78-84. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English (*For Her Own Good: 150 Years of Experts' Advice to Women*, New York, 1978) are excellent on the issue of familial ideology in the postwar period.

28. Russell Lynes presents evidence that Steichen's appointment to the position of Director of the MoMA Department of Photography in 1947 involved an unsuccessful plan to bring direct funding from photographic corporations into the museum. Although unsurprising today, in an era of direct corporate funding, this was a novel move in the late 1940s. (Russell Lynes, *Good Old Modern*, New York, 1973, pp. 259-260.)



Figure 5: Installation detail from *The Family of Man*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955. Installation by Paul Rudolph. Photograph by Ezra Stoller.

29. Carl Sandburg, "Prologue," *The Family of Man*, New York, 1955.



Architect: Paul Rudolph

Steichen's photographic tribute to humanity is so huge and covers such a wide scope that it requires new approaches to organization and display. The architect's drawing above shows how some of the problems were solved. Groups of related pictures are indicated by number in approximately the order they are seen by a visitor walking through the exhibition: 1 entrance arch, 2 lovers, 3 childbirth, 4 mothers and children, 5 children playing, 6 disturbed children, 7 fathers and sons, 8 photograph displayed on the floor, 9 "family of man" central theme pictures, 10 agriculture, 11 labor, 12 household and office work, 13 eating, 14 folk-singing, 15 dancing, 16 music, 17 drinking, 18 playing, 19 ring-around-the-rosy stand, 20 learning, thinking, and teaching, 21 human relations, 22 death, 23 loneliness, 24 grief, pity, 25 dreamers, 26 religion, 27 hard times and famine, 28 man's inhumanity to man, 29 rebels, 30 youth, 31 justice, 32 public debate, 33 faces of war, 34 dead soldier, 35 illuminated transparency of H-bomb explosion, 36 UN, and 37 children.

Figure 6: Floorplan and synopsis of *The Family of Man*. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1955. Installation by Paul Rudolph. Annotated diagram published in *Popular Photography*, May 1955.

30. Lynes, *Good Old Modern*, p. 233.

31. Eva Cockcroft, "Abstract Expressionism as a Weapon of the Cold War," *Artforum*, Vol. XII, No. 10, June 1974, pp. 39-41. See also Max Kozloff "American Painting During the Cold War," *Artforum*, Vol. XI, No. 9, May 1973, pp. 43-54; William Hauptman, "The Suppression of Art in the McCarthy Decade," *Artforum*, Vol. XII, No. 2, October 1973, pp. 48-52. Of general interest is Christopher Lasch's "The Cultural Cold War: A Short History of the Congress for Cultural Freedom," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton Bernstein, New York, 1969, pp. 322-359. It is interesting, if not terribly relevant to my present argument, to note that Harry Lunn, currently regarded as the biggest photographic dealer in the U.S., was a principal agent in the CIA's infiltration of the National Student Association in the 1950s and 60s, according to Sol Stern, "NSA and the CIA, A Short Account of International Student Politics and the Cold War," *Ramparts*, Vol. 5, No. 9, March 1967, p. 33.

exhibition: Sandburg describes *The Family of Man* as a "multiplication table of living breathing human faces."²⁹ Suddenly, arithmetic and humanism collide, forced by poetic license into an absurd harmony. Here, yet again, are the twin ghosts that haunt the practice of photography: the voice of a reifying technocratic objectivism and the redemptive voice of a liberal subjectivism. The statistics that seek to legitimate the exhibition, to demonstrate its value, begin to carry a deeper sense: the truth being promoted here is one of enumeration. This is an estheticized job of global accounting, a careful Cold War effort to bring about the ideological alignment of the neo-colonial peripheries with the imperial center. American culture of both elite and mass varieties was being promoted as more universal than that of the Soviet Union.

A brief note on the cultural politics of the Cold War might be valuable here. Nelson Rockefeller, who welcomed *The Family of Man* with the characteristic exuberance noted above, was the principle architect of MoMA's International Circulating Exhibitions Program, which received a five year grant from the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund beginning in 1952. Under the directorship of Porter MacCray, this program exhibited American vanguard art abroad, and, in the words of Russell Lynes, "let it be known especially in Europe that America was not the cultural backwater that the Russians during that tense period called 'the cold war' were trying to demonstrate that it was."³⁰ Eva Cockcroft has shown convincingly that this non-governmental sponsorship was closely allied with CIA efforts to promote American high culture abroad while circumventing the MacCarthyist probings of right-wing Congressmen who, for example, saw Abstract Expressionism as a manifestation of the international communist conspiracy.³¹ But since the formal rhetoric of *The Family of Man* was that of photo-journalistic realism, no antagonisms of this sort developed; and although a number of the photographers who contributed pictures to the exhibition were or had been affiliated with left parties or causes, Steichen himself, the grand author of this massive photo essay, was above suspicion. Thus *Family of Man* was directly sponsored by the USIA, and openly embraced by the co-sponsoring corporations as a valuable marketing and public relations tool. The exhibition was intended to have an immense popular appeal, and was more extensively circulated than any other MoMA production. Even medium-sized cities in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, Japan, and the Third World received the show. For example, in India alone the exhibition turned up in Bombay, Agra, New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Madras, and Trivandrum. In South Africa *The Family of Man* was shown in Johannesburg, Capetown, Durban, Pretoria, Windhoek (Southwest Africa), Port Elizabeth, and Uitenhage. In domestic showings in New York State alone, the original MoMA exhibit was followed by appearances in Utica, Corning, Rochester, and Binghamton. Shades of American television, but with higher pretensions.

From my reading of the records of foreign showings of *The Family of Man*, it seems clear that the exhibition tended to appear in political “hot spots” throughout the Third World. I quote from a United States Information Agency memo concerning the Djakarta showing in 1962:

The exhibition proved to have wide appeal . . . in spite of the fact that . . . the period coincided with a circus sponsored by the Soviet Union, complete with a performing bear.

*The exhibit was opened with a reception to which members of the most important target groups in Djakarta were invited.*³²

In a more lyrical vein, Steichen recalled the Guatemala City showing in his autobiography, *A Life in Photography*:

A notable experience was reported in Guatemala. On the final day of the exhibition, a Sunday, several thousand Indians from the hills of Guatemala came on foot or muleback to see it. An American visitor said it was like a religious experience to see these barefoot country people who could not read or write walk silently through the exhibition gravely studying each picture with rapt attention.

*Regardless of the place, the response was always the same . . . the people in the audience looked at the pictures and the people in the pictures looked back at them. They recognized each other.*³³

At the risk of boring some readers with more statistics, allow me to recall that in 1954, only fourteen months earlier, the United States directly supported a coup in Guatemala, overthrowing the democratically elected government of Jacobo Arbenz, who had received 72 percent of the popular vote in the 1950 elections. American pilots flew bombing missions during the coup. When Arbenz took office, 98 percent of the land in Guatemala was owned by 142 people, with corporations counted as individuals. Arbenz nationalized 200,000 acres of unused United Fruit Company land, agreeing to pay for the land with 25 year bonds, rather than engaging in outright expropriation. In establishing the terms of payment, the Guatemalan government accepted the United Fruit valuation of the land at \$600,000, which had been claimed for tax purposes. Suddenly United Fruit claimed that the disputed land was worth \$16 million, and approached the U.S. State Department for assistance. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who was both a United Fruit stockholder and a former legal counsel to the firm, touted the successful invasion and coup as a “new and glorious chapter in the already great tradition of the American States.”³⁴ Following the coup the U.S.-sponsored dictatorship of Colonel Castillo Armas dismantled agrarian reform and disenfranchised the 70 percent of the population that could, in Steichen’s words, “neither read nor write.” In this context, “visual literacy” takes on a grim meaning.

Finally, my last exhibit concerning this Cold War extravaganza: a corporate commentary on the showing of *The Family of Man* in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1958 attempted to link the universalism of the exhibition to the global authority of the commodity.

32. United States Information Agency Memo, subject “Djakarta showing of *Family of Man*,” Feb. 5, 1962. A copy of this memo is in the files of the International Council Office of MoMA.

33. Edward Steichen, *A Life in Photography*, New York, 1962, n.p.

34. Department of State White Paper, *Intervention of International Communism in Guatemala*, 1954, p. 33, quoted in David Horowitz, *Free World Colossus*, New York, 1965, p. 160. The summary of events in Guatemala here is taken largely from Felix Greene, *The Enemy*, New York, 1971, pp. 196-198, with some references to Horowitz, pp. 160-181.

35. *Coca-Cola Overseas*, December 1958, p. 15.

36. In 1955, the conservative critic Hilton Kramer attacked *Family of Man* for displaying liberal naiveté in an era of harsh political realities, claiming that the exhibition was “a reassertion in visual terms of all that has been discredited in progressive ideology.” (Hilton Kramer, “Exhibiting the Family of Man,” *Commentary*, Vol. 20, No. 4, October 1955.)

37. For further criticism of *Family of Man* from the political left see Roland Barthes, “The Great Family of Man,” in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers, New York, 1972, pp. 100-102. I also found an unpublished English translation of an essay by Edmundo Desnoes, “The Photographic Image of Underdevelopment” (translator unknown) extremely valuable. This essay appeared in Spanish in *Punto de Vista*, Havana, 1967.

*At the entrance of the hall the large globe of the world encircled by bottles of Coca-Cola created a most attractive eye catching display and identified our product with Family of Man sponsorship.*³⁵

And thus an orbiting soft drink answered the technological challenge of Sputnik. *The Family of Man* worked to make a bottled mixture of sugar, water, caramel color and caffeine “humanly interesting” to recall Steichen’s expressed ambition for his advertising work of the late 1920s and 30s. In the political landscape of apartheid, characterized by a brutal racial hierarchy of caloric intakes and forced separation of black African families, sugar and familial sentiment were made to commingle in the imagination.

Clearly, both the sexual and international politics of *The Family of Man* are especially interesting today, in light of the headlong return of American politics to the familialism and interventionism of a new cold war, both domestic and international in scope. *The Family of Man* is a virtual guidebook to the collapse of the political into the familial that so characterizes the dominant ideological discourse of the contemporary United States. In a sense, *The Family of Man* provides a blueprint of sorts for more recent political theater; I am thinking here of the orchestrations of the Vietnam P.O.W. “homecoming” and the return of the American hostages from Iran. However, it would be a mistake not to realize that *The Family of Man* eschewed the bellicosity and racism that accompanies these latter dramas; in this, it represented the limit of an official liberal discourse in the Cold War era.³⁶ The peaceful world envisioned by *The Family of Man* is merely a smoothly functioning international market economy, in which economic bonds have been translated into spurious sentimental ties, and in which the overt racism appropriate to earlier forms of colonial enterprise has been supplanted by the “humanization of the other” so central to the discourse of neo-colonialism.³⁷

Again, what are we to make of the argument that photography constitutes a universal language? Implicit in this claim is the suggestion that photography acts as a miraculous universal solvent upon the linguistic barriers between peoples. Visual culture, having been pushed to an unprecedented level of technical refinement, loses specificity, cultural difference is cancelled and a “common language” prevails on a global scale. Paradoxically, a medium that is seen as subtly responsive to the minutest details of time and place delivers these details through an unacknowledged, naturalized epistemological grid. As the myth of a universal photographic language would have it, photography is more natural than natural language, touching on a common, underlying system of desire and understanding closely tied to the senses. Photography would seem to be a way of *knowing* the world directly — this is the scientific aspect of our faith in the powers of the photographic image. But photography would also seem to be a way of *feeling* the world directly, with a kind of prelinguistic, affective openness of

the visual sense — this is the estheticist aspect of our faith in the medium. As a symbolic practice, then, photography constitutes not a universal language but a paradoxical yoking of a primitivist, Rousseauian dream, the dream of romantic naturalism, with an unbounded faith in a technological imperative. The worldliness of photography is the outcome, not of any immanent universality of meaning, but of a project of global domination. The language of the imperial centers is imposed, both forcefully and seductively, upon the peripheries.

III. Universal Equivalent

Photography was dreamt of and slowly invented under the shadow of a fading European aristocracy; it became practical and profitable in the period of the continental European revolutions of 1848, the period in which class struggle first took the clear form of an explosive political confrontation between bourgeoisie and urban proletariat waged against the conflict-ridden backdrop of everyday industrial production. Photography proliferated, becoming reproducible and accessible in the modern sense, during the late nineteenth-century period of transition from competitive capitalism to the financially and industrially consolidated monopoly form of capitalist organization. By the turn of the century, then, photography stands ready to play a central role in the development of a culture centered on the mass marketing of mass-produced commodities.

Perhaps more than any other single technical invention of the mid-nineteenth century, photography came to focus the confidence and fears of an ascendent industrial bourgeoisie. This essay is an attempt to understand the contradictory role played by photography within the culture dominated by that class. As we have seen briefly and will see again, this role combined a coldly rational scientism with a sentimental and often antirational pursuit of the beautiful.

But my argument here seeks to avoid simple deterministic conclusions: to suggest that the practice of photography is entirely and inseparably bound by capitalist social relations would be reductive and undialectical in the extreme. As a social practice photography is no more a "reflection" of capitalist society than a particular photograph is a "reflection" of its referential object. Conversely, photography is not a neutral semiotic technique, transparently open to both "reactionary" and "progressive" uses. The issue is much more complicated than either extreme would have us believe. Although I want to argue here that photography is fundamentally related in its normative way of depicting the world to an epistemology and an esthetics that are intrinsic to a system of commodity exchange, as I have suggested before, photography also needs to be understood as a simultaneous *threat* and *promise* in its relation to the prevailing cultural ambitions of a triumphant but

wary western bourgeoisie of the mid-nineteenth century. The historical context was one of crisis and paradox; to forget this is to risk achieving an overly harmonized understanding of the contradictory material and symbolic forces at work in the development of bourgeois culture.

With this warning in mind, I would like to turn to an extraordinary text written by the American physician, essayist and poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes, published in 1859 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Holmes is in many senses an exemplary, even if unique, figure in nineteenth-century New England culture. Furthermore, he embodies the oscillating movement between scientism and estheticism that so pervades the discourse of photography. Holmes was both a practical man of science — an advocate of positivism — and a genteel man of letters — the archetypal Boston Brahmin, Autocrat, Poet, and Professor of the breakfast table. He was a founding member of the American Medical Association and, in company with Emerson, Lowell and Longfellow, a founder of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Characteristically, Holmes's writing veers between surgical metaphors and allusions to the classics. Perhaps there was no American writer who was better prepared, both rhetorically and ideologically, to envelop photography in the web of Culture.

Holmes's essay on "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph" was one of many optimistic early attempts to both philosophize and prognosticate about photography. Significantly, English and American physicians seem to have been prominent in voicing unqualified enthusiasm for the powers of the camera. Holmes, however, goes to hyperbolic extremes. Citing Democritus, he suggests that photography establishes a means of capturing the visual effluvia that are continuously "shed from the surfaces of solids."³⁸ Arguing, as was common at the time, that photographs are products of the sun's artistry, he coins the phrase "mirror with a memory,"³⁹ thereby implying that the camera is a wholly passive, reflective, technical apparatus. In this view nature reproduces itself. Thus, while Holmes casually prefaces his discussion of photography with a mention of the railroad, the telegraph, and chloroform, it would seem that photography constitutes a uniquely privileged technical invention in its refusal or inability to dominate or transform the realm of nature. Photography would seem to offer an inherently preservationist approach to nature. So far, there is nothing in Holmes's argument that is not relatively common to what is by now the thoroughly institutionalized discourse of photographic naturalism.

But the essay takes a rather bizarre turn as Holmes ventures to speculate about the future of photography in a conclusion that seems somewhat prototypical of science fiction, even if entirely deadpan in its apocalyptic humor:

Form is henceforth divorced from matter. *In fact, matter as a visible object is of no great use any longer, except as the mould on which form is shaped. Give us a few negatives of a*

38. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. III, No. 20, June 1859, p. 738. My attention was directed to this essay by an insightful article by Harvey Green, " 'Pasteboard Masks,' the Stereograph in American Culture, 1865-1910," in *Points of View: The Stereograph in America — A Cultural History*, ed. Edward Earle, Rochester, New York, 1979, p. 109.

39. Holmes, "Stereoscope," p. 739.

thing worth seeing, taken from different points of view, and that is all we want of it. Pull it down or burn it up, if you please. (emphasis in original)⁴⁰

Perhaps it is important to interject that Holmes is discussing the stereograph apparatus, the most effective of nineteenth-century illusionistic machineries in its ability to reconstruct binocular vision and thus offer a potent sensation of three-dimensional depth. (Holmes invented a hand-held stereo viewer, and was an avid collector of stereo views.)

Also, like the diorama and the lantern-slide show, the stereoscope delivered a total visual experience: immersed within the field of the illusion, eyes virtually riveted to the sockets of the machine, the viewer lost all sense of the pasteboard or glass material substrate of the image. Despite the slight discomfort of the body that bore the weight of the machine, the experience was one of disembodied vision, vision lacking the illusion-shattering boundary of a frame. Thus the stereo process was particularly liable to give rise to a belief in dematerialized form.

But would it be absurd for me to suggest that Holmes is describing something analogous to the capitalist exchange process, whereby exchange values are detached from, and exist independently of, the use values of commodities? The dominant metaphor in Holmes's discussion is that of bourgeois political economy; just as use value is eclipsed by exchange value, so the photographic sign comes to eclipse its referent. For Holmes, quite explicitly, the photograph is akin to money. The parallel with political economy becomes even more apparent as Holmes continues:

*Matter in large masses must always be fixed and dear; form is cheap and transportable. We have got hold of the fruit of creation now, and need not trouble ourselves with the core. Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us.*⁴¹

But we are not talking simply about a global political economy of signs, we are also invited to imagine an epistemological treasure trove, an encyclopedia organized according to a global hierarchy of knowledge and power. Diderot's ghost animates Holmes's Yankee enthusiasm:

*The time will come when a man who wishes to see any object, natural or artificial, will go to the Imperial, National, or City Stereographic Library and call for its skin or form, as he would for a book at any common library.*⁴²

How prophetic and typical that an American, writing in an aggressively expanding republic, should invoke the fictitious authority of empire in his vision of the future. Finally, Holmes gets down to brass tacks:

*Already a workman has been traveling about the country with stereographic views of furniture, showing his employer's patterns in this way, and taking orders for them. This is a mere hint of what is coming before long.*⁴³

40. Ibid., p. 747.

44. Ibid., p. 748.

45. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, trans. Ben Fowkes, New York, 1977, p. 165.

41. Ibid., p. 748.

42. Ibid., p. 748.

43. Ibid., p. 748.

(In fact, by 1850, traveling clock salesmen are known to have carried boxes of daguerreotypes illustrating their line of products.) Holmes's vision of an expanded system of photographic advertising leads to a direct appeal for an expanded economy of images:

*And as a means of facilitating the formation of public and private stereographic collections, there must be arranged a comprehensive system of exchanges, so that there might grow up something like a universal currency of these bank-notes, on promises to pay in solid substance, which the sun has engraved for the great Bank of Nature.*⁴⁴

Note that Holmes, true to the logic of commodity fetishism, finds the origin of this money-like aspect of the photograph, not in human labor, but in a direct "miraculous" agency of Nature. Recall Marx's crucial definition of the commodity fetish, first published in 1867, in the first volume of *Capital*:

*... the definite social relation between men themselves ... assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.*⁴⁵

For Holmes, photographs stand as the "universal equivalent," capable of denoting the quantitative exchangeability of all sights. Just as money is the universal gauge of exchange value, uniting all the world goods in a single system of transactions, so photographs are imagined to reduce all sights to relations of formal equivalence. Here, I think, lies one major aspect of the origins of the pervasive formalism that haunts the visual arts of the bourgeois epoch. Formalism collects all the world's images in a single esthetic emporium, torn from all contingencies of origin, meaning and use. Holmes is dreaming of this transcendental esthetic closure, while also entertaining a pragmatic faith in the photograph as a transparent gauge of the real. Like money, the photograph is both a fetishized end in itself and a calibrated signifier of a value that resides elsewhere, both autonomous and bound to its referential function:

*To render comparison of similar objects, or of any that we may wish to see side by side, easy, there should be a stereographic metre or fixed standard of focal length for the camera lens. . . . In this way the eye can make the most rapid and exact comparisons. If the 'great elm' and Cowthorpe Oak, the State-House and Saint Peter's were taken on the same scale, and looked at with the same magnifying power, we should compare them without the possibility of being misled by those partialities which might make us tend to overrate the indigenous vegetable and the dome of our native Michel Angelo.*⁴⁶

In what may be a typically American fashion, Holmes seems to be confusing quantity with quality, even in modestly suggesting the

46. Holmes, "Stereoscope," p. 748.

inferiorities of the American natural and architectural landscape. More generally, Holmes shares the pervasive faith in the mathematical truth of the camera.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, like most other promoters of photography, manages to establish a false discursive unity; shifting schizophrenically from instrumentalism to estheticism, from Yankee pragmatism and empiricism to a rather loose romanticism, thus recalling that other related incongruity, Ralph Waldo Emerson's linkage of the "natural fact" and the "spiritual fact."⁴⁷ The ideological custodians of photography are forced to periodically switch hats, to move from positivist to metaphysician with the turn of a phrase. It is the metaphysician who respiritualizes the rationalized project of photographic representation. Thus Holmes in a later essay on photography, speaks of *carte-de-visite* portraits as "the sentimental 'greenbacks' of civilization."⁴⁸ All of this is evidence of a society in which economic relations appear, as Marx put it, "as material relations between persons and social relations between things."⁴⁹ Holmes ends his first essay with an appropriately idealist inversion of the Promethean myth:

... a new epoch in the history of human progress dates from the time when He . . . took a pencil of fire from the hand of the 'angel standing in the sun' and placed it in the hands of a mortal.⁵⁰

So much for bourgeois humanism: Prometheus is no longer an arrogant rebel but a grateful recipient of divine favors. And so technical progress is reconciled with theology. Photography, as it was thus conceived in mid-nineteenth century America, was the vocation of pious accountants.

IV. Conclusion

A final concluding anecdote to end this essay, much too long already. Crossing the cavernous main floor of New York's Grand Central Station recently, I looked up to see the latest installment in a thirty-odd year exhibition of monumental, back-illuminated dye-transfer transparencies; a picture, taken low to the wet earth of rural Ireland, a lush vegetable apparition of landscape and cottage, suspended above this gloomy urban terminal for human traffic. With this image — seemingly bigger and more illusionistic, even in its stillness, than Cinerama — everything that is absent is made present. Above — stillness, home, hearth, the soil, the remote old country for many travellers, an affordable or unaffordable vacation spot for others, a seductive sight for eyes that must strain hurriedly in the gloom to read timetables. Below — the city, a site for the purposeful flow of bodies. Accompanying this giant photograph, a caption reads, as nearly as I can remember:

PHOTOGRAPHY: THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE
EASTMAN KODAK 1880-1980

47. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Nature" (1844), *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. I, Cambridge, 1971, p. 18.

48. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. XIII. No. 49, July 1863, p. 8.

49. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, p. 166.

50. Holmes, "Stereoscope," p. 748.

51. George Eastman, quoted in J. M. Eder, *History of Photography*, trans. E. Epstein, New York, 1945, p. 489.

And what of the universality of this name, Kodak, unknown to any language until coined in 1888 by George Eastman, inventor of roll film, pioneer in horizontal and vertical corporate integration, in the global mass-marketing of consumer goods? Eastman offered this etymological explanation in 1924, in *American Photography*:

*Philologically, therefore, the word 'kodak' is as meaningless as a child's first 'goo.' Terse, abrupt to the point of rudeness, literally bitten off by firm unyielding consonants at both ends, it snaps like a camera shutter in your face. What more could one ask?*⁵¹

And so we are introduced to a "language" that is primitive, infantile, aggressive — the imaginary discourse of the machine. The crucial question remains to be asked: can photography be anything else?

1981



Figure 7: The International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House enshrines a third history as well, a history of entrepreneurial and industrial genius. Here the biography of George Eastman — who is described by museum publicity as the "father of popular photography" — is the central narrative. Photograph by the author, 1978.

PHOTO WORKS

Aerospace Folktales

Introductory Note

In its original version, *Aerospace Folktales* was a bit like a disassembled movie. The work was made up of three separate narrative elements: images, a spoken "sound track," and a written commentary. The images consisted of 142 photographic prints and titles grouped into subordinate narrative sequences. The "sound track" consisted of four conversations, ranging in form from polemic to anecdote. The sound track was seventy-five minutes long and played continuously in a small room adjoining the larger exhibition space. On another occasion, the tape played from behind a large potted plant. The written commentary was displayed at the end of the photographic sequence, and constituted the self-implication of the artist.

Aerospace Folktales was first exhibited at the University of California at San Diego in early 1973. A year later, it was shown at the Brand Library Art Center in Glendale, California, not far from Lockheed's Burbank plant. Subsequently, a photocopy version of the work in book form also was exhibited.

The version presented here evolved out of informal presentations of the work using two slide projectors. The general narrative flow of the original has been maintained, although individual sequences have been shortened considerably. The four conversations have been reduced by two.

Lockheed today is a broadly based industrial complex, adding constantly to our skills in translating discoveries of science into advanced products, systems, and services for human progress and national defense. Our productive abilities are rooted in decades of experience. In the words of chairman Dan Haughton: "We'd rather be advancing the state of the art than standing still. Our competence has kept us in the forefront of the industry.... I know that at Lockheed our own eyes are on the future, and our efforts are in large part directed toward realizing it fully."

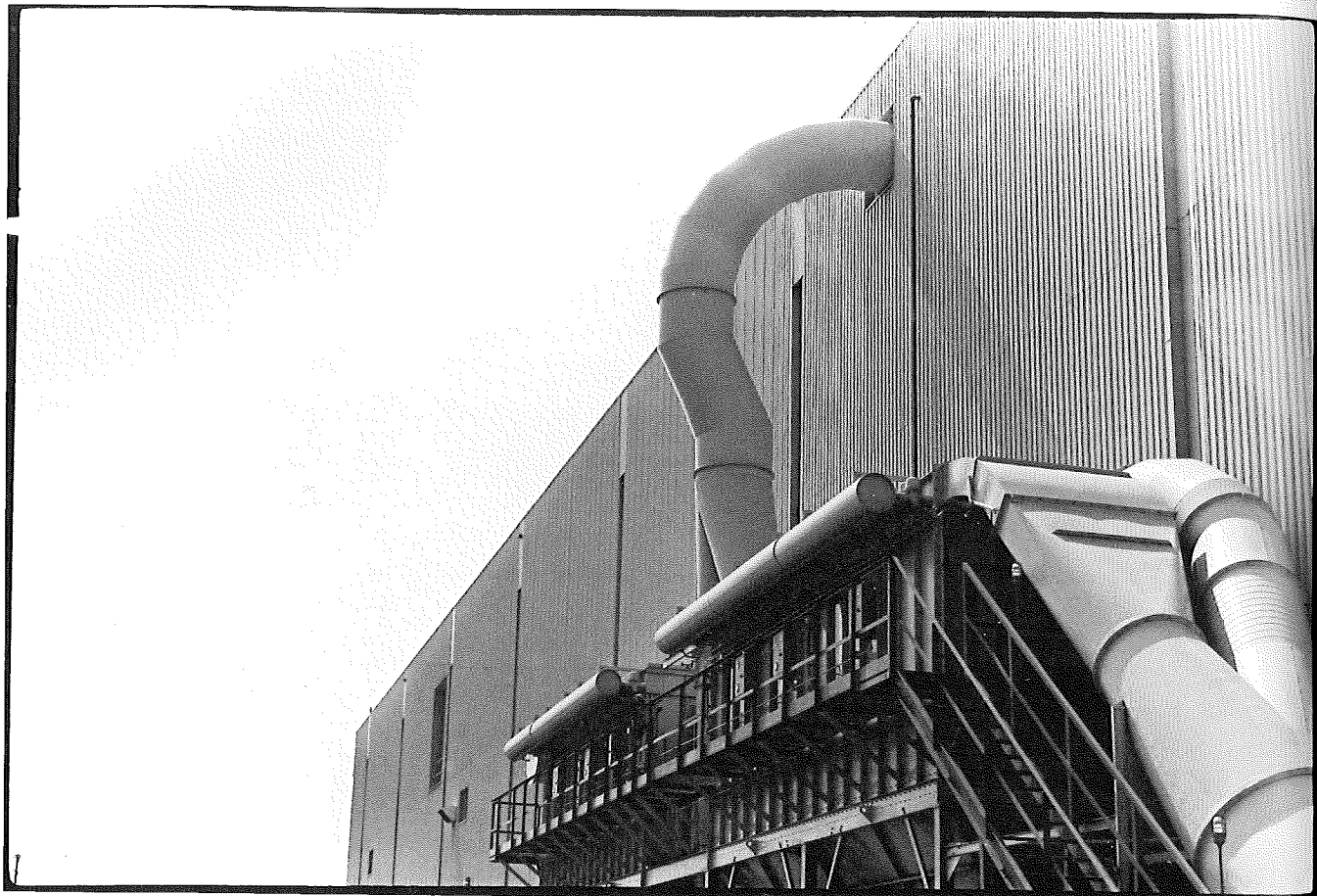
Days of Trial and Triumph: A Pictorial History of Lockheed, 1969



The engineer and his old friend stood in the empty Lockheed parking lot while I photographed them.

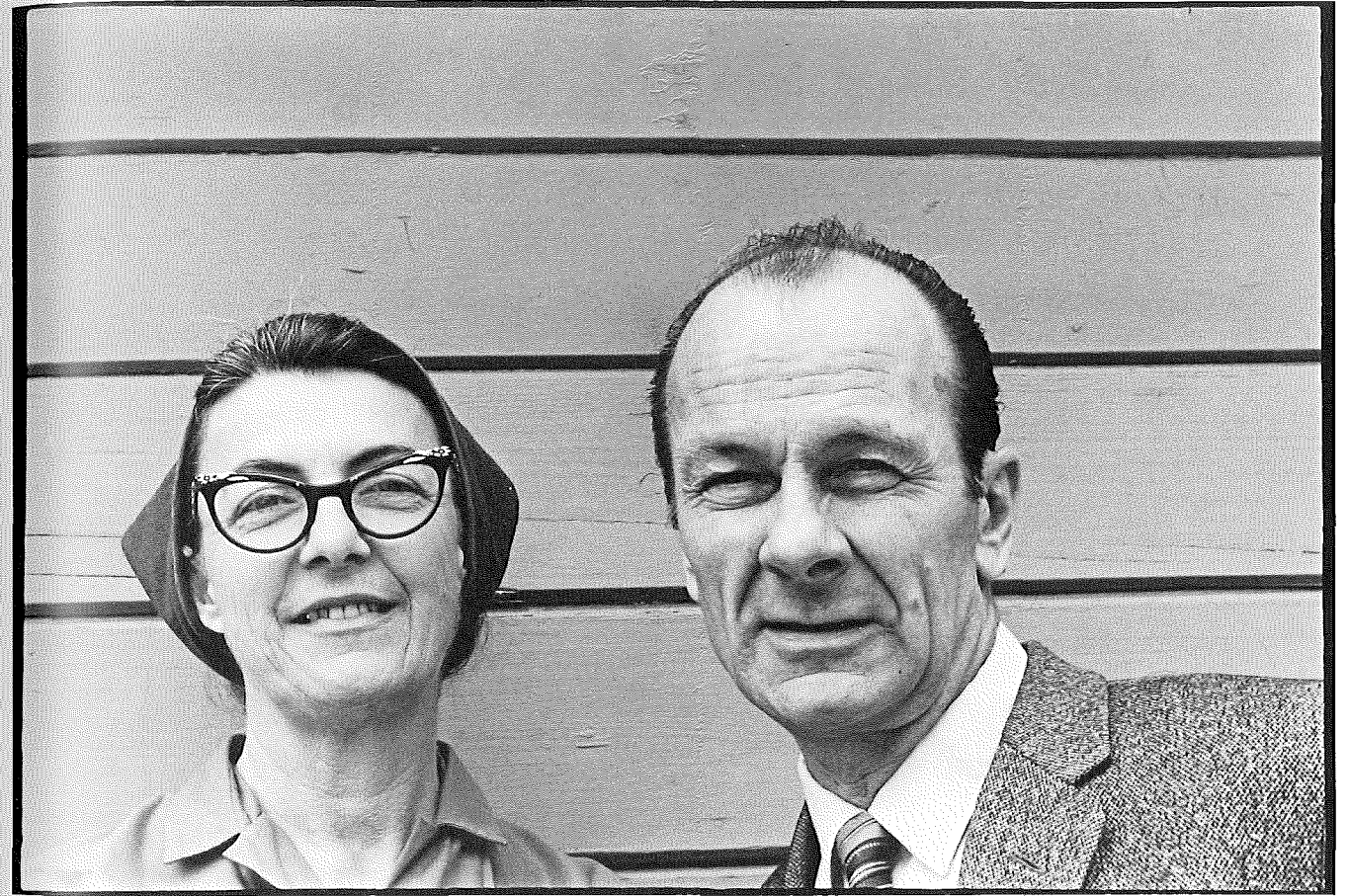
Unable to fathom my motives, they were uneasy.





I photographed the family standing around.







TENANT POLICIES

As tenants of the Marine View Apartments, we want you to enjoy your stay here. The Management's prime objectives are to achieve the following:

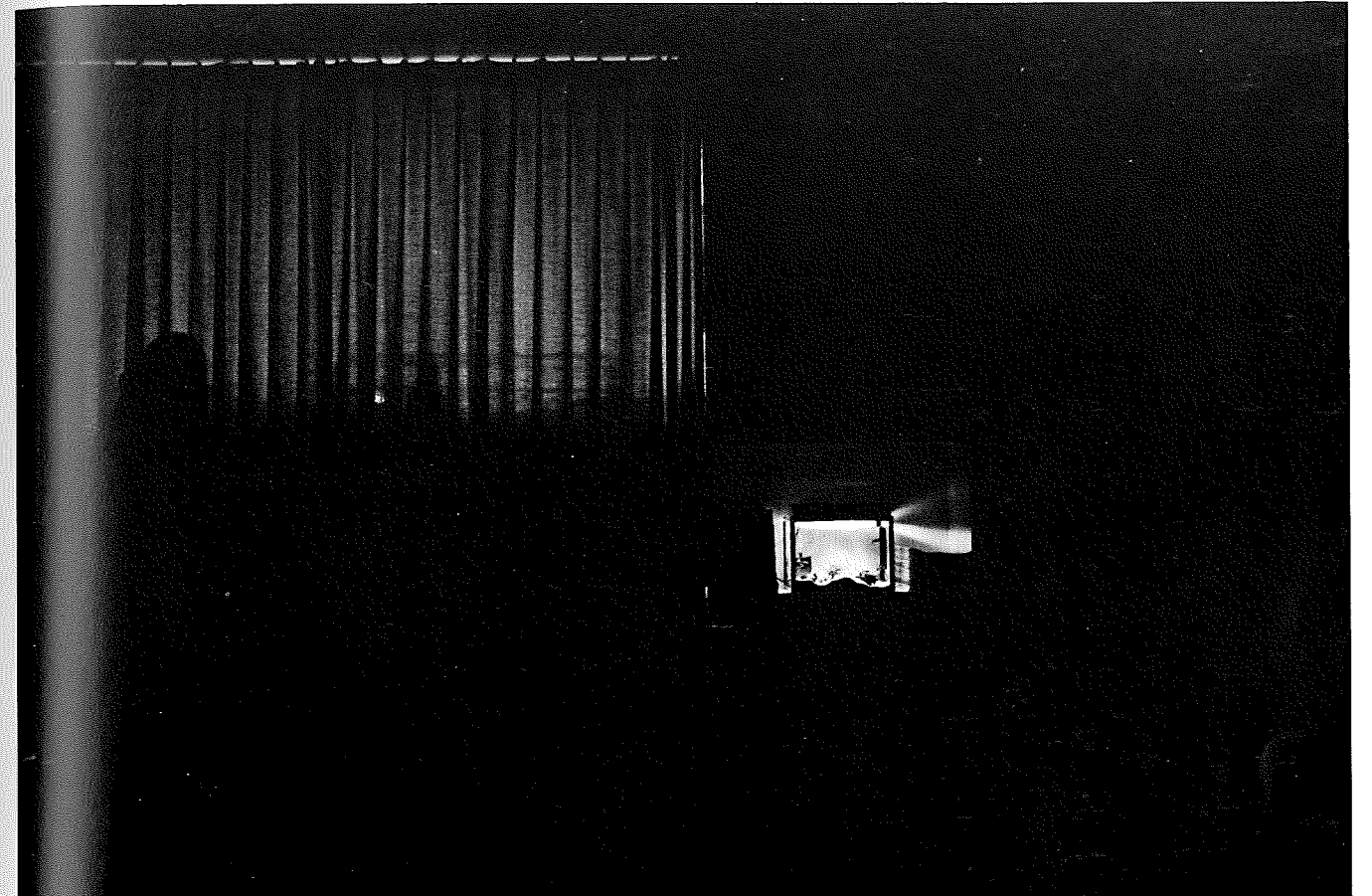
1. Make this a pleasant place in which to live.
2. Try to keep the rents as reasonable as possible.

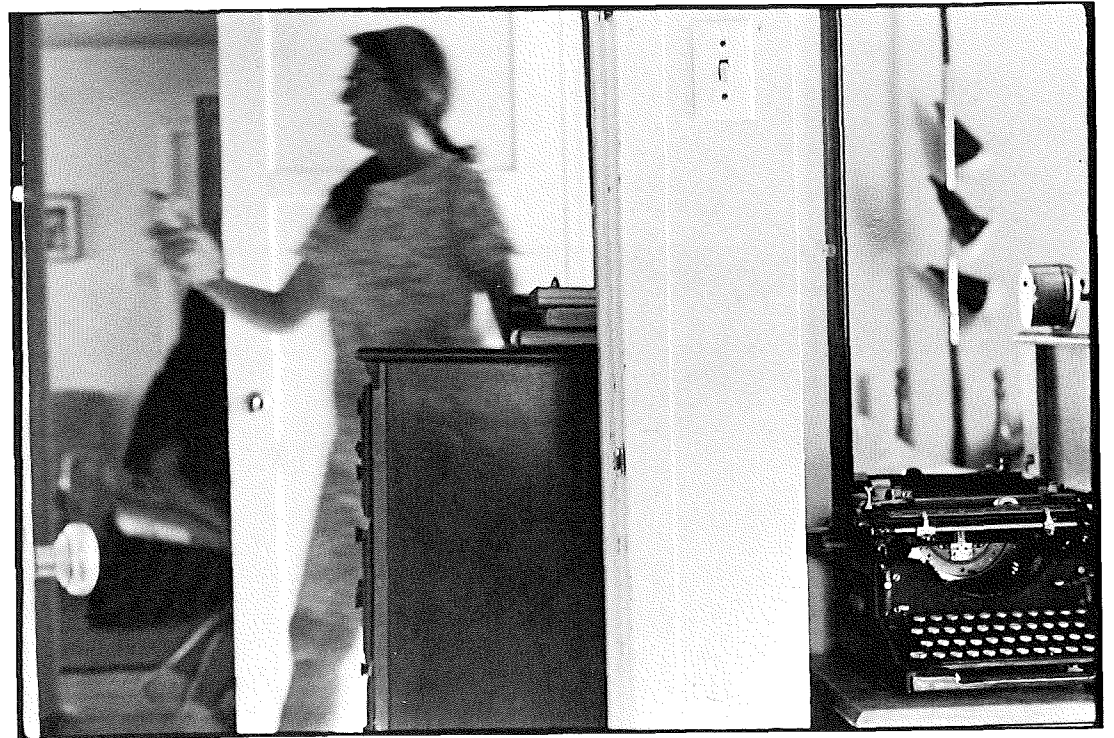
In order to accomplish these objectives, it is important that all tenants cooperate fully. When one tenant is careless and causes increased maintenance, then all the tenants must share the increased costs of maintenance. All tenants must, therefore, follow the considerations and policies listed below:

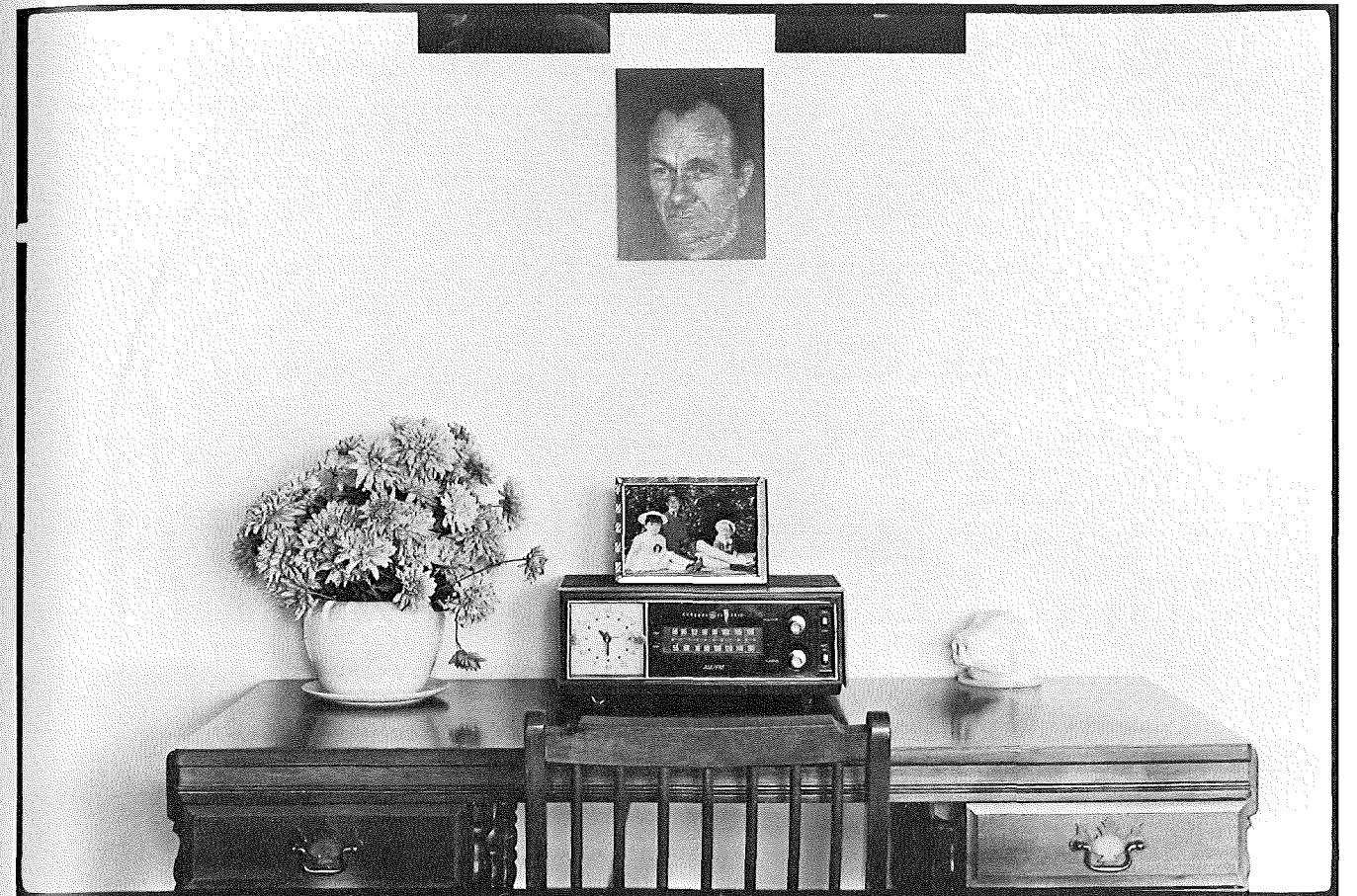
1. Do not throw papers or trash on the grounds. Pick up all your newspapers and advertising.
2. If you have children, pick up all the papers and toys that they tend to leave outside the buildings. Better yet - train the children to do it.
3. Watch the children so that they do not deface the building with crayons, felt pens, etc.
4. Water the lawns around your apartment once or twice a week. Our gardener will keep it mowed. While we want you to water the lawns, you should not waste water carelessly. Water is expensive.
5. Contact paper is not to be put on the walls; it is to be used only on shelves.
6. Parking is a problem. If you have more than one car, the other car(s) must be parked on the street. One tenant cannot park two or three cars back of the apartment and deprive other tenants of a parking space.
7. Washrooms
 - a. Children are not to play in the washrooms. Please keep your children out of them.
 - b. Keep the washrooms clean. Pick up after yourself when you finish washing.
8. Pets Tenants are not allowed to obtain pets after moving into an apartment. Do not break your rental agreement and become subject to eviction.
9. Showers Some showers do not stop dripping the instant the water is shut off. It takes a few seconds to drain the lines. Do not force the shut-off valves closed too tightly as this damages the valve. If the water is still dripping after a couple minutes, call the office and we will repair it.
10. Noise Keep TV, stereo, and radio set's volume level down to a moderate level. Do not turn the volume up to a level that the neighbors are disturbed. Late at night they must only be played very softly. Do not disturb your neighbors.

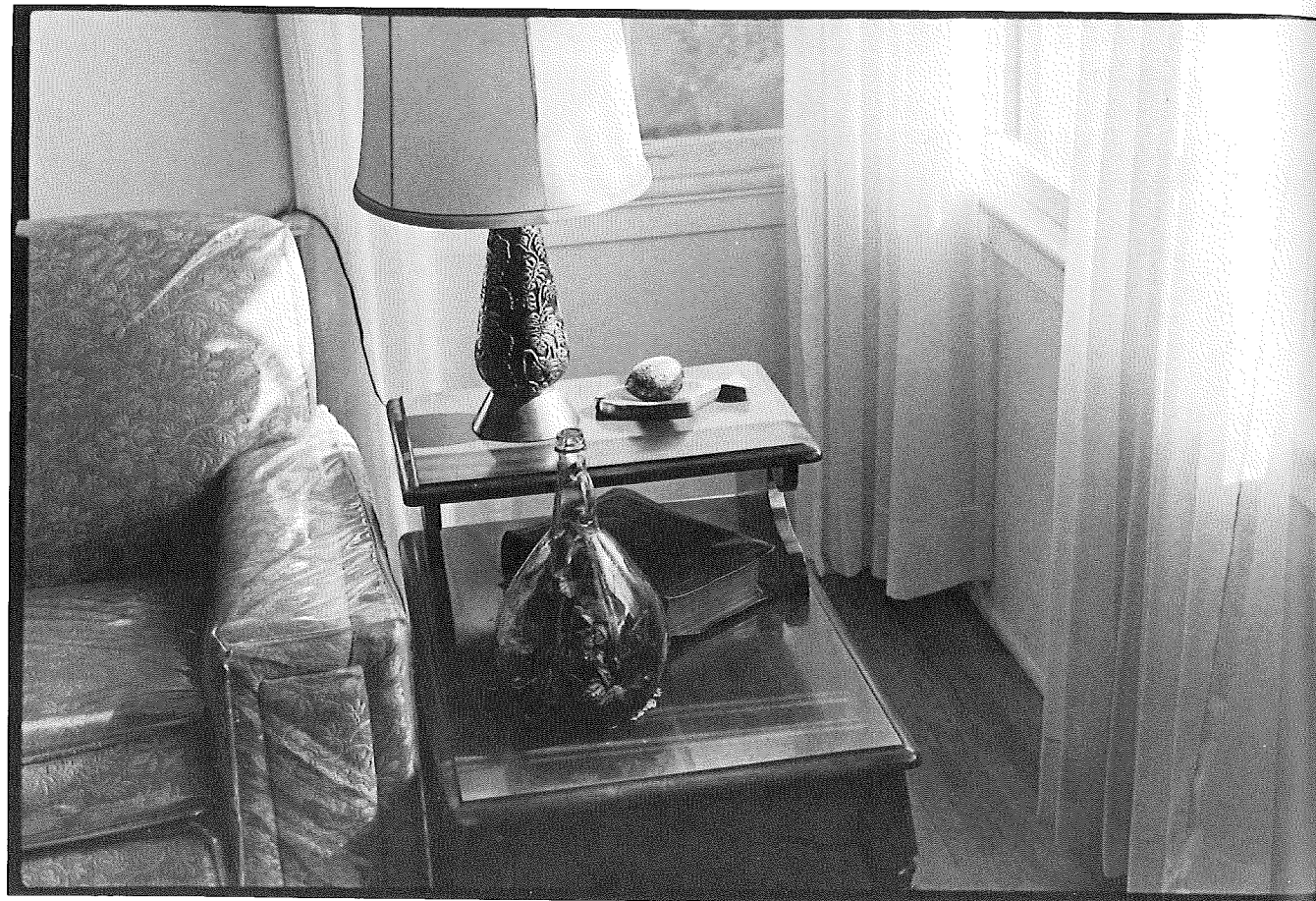
THE MANAGEMENT

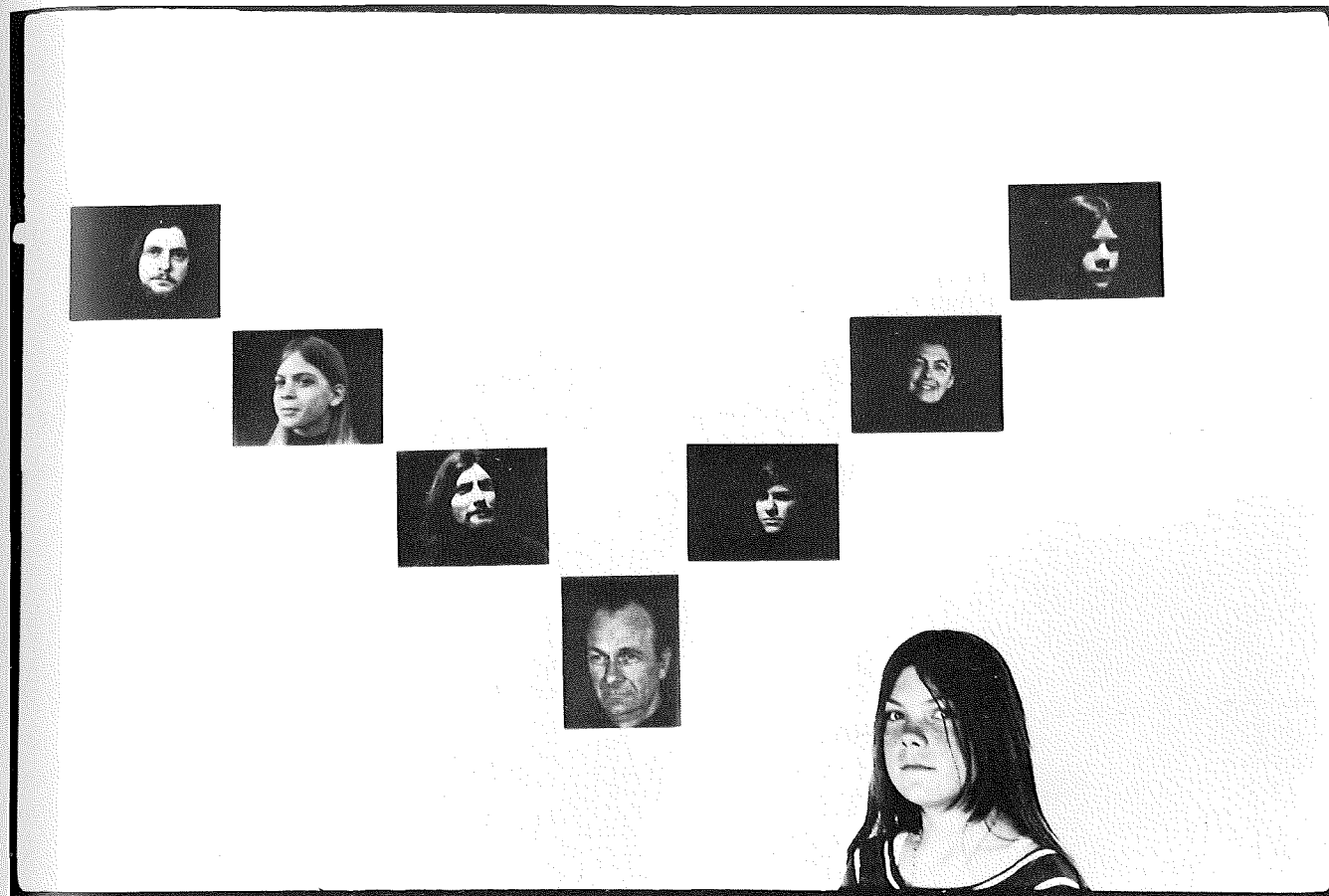
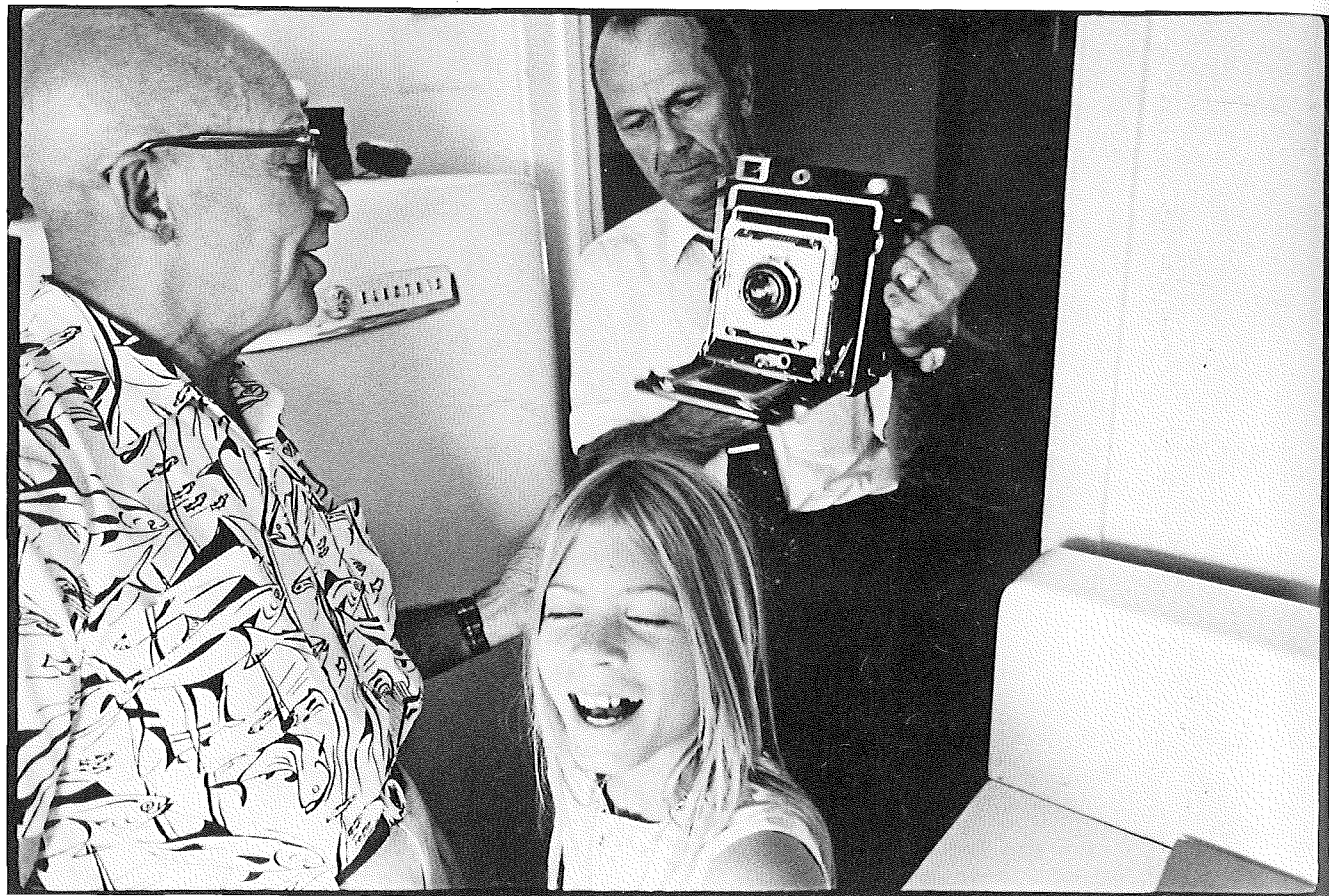
I photographed the inside of the apartment.





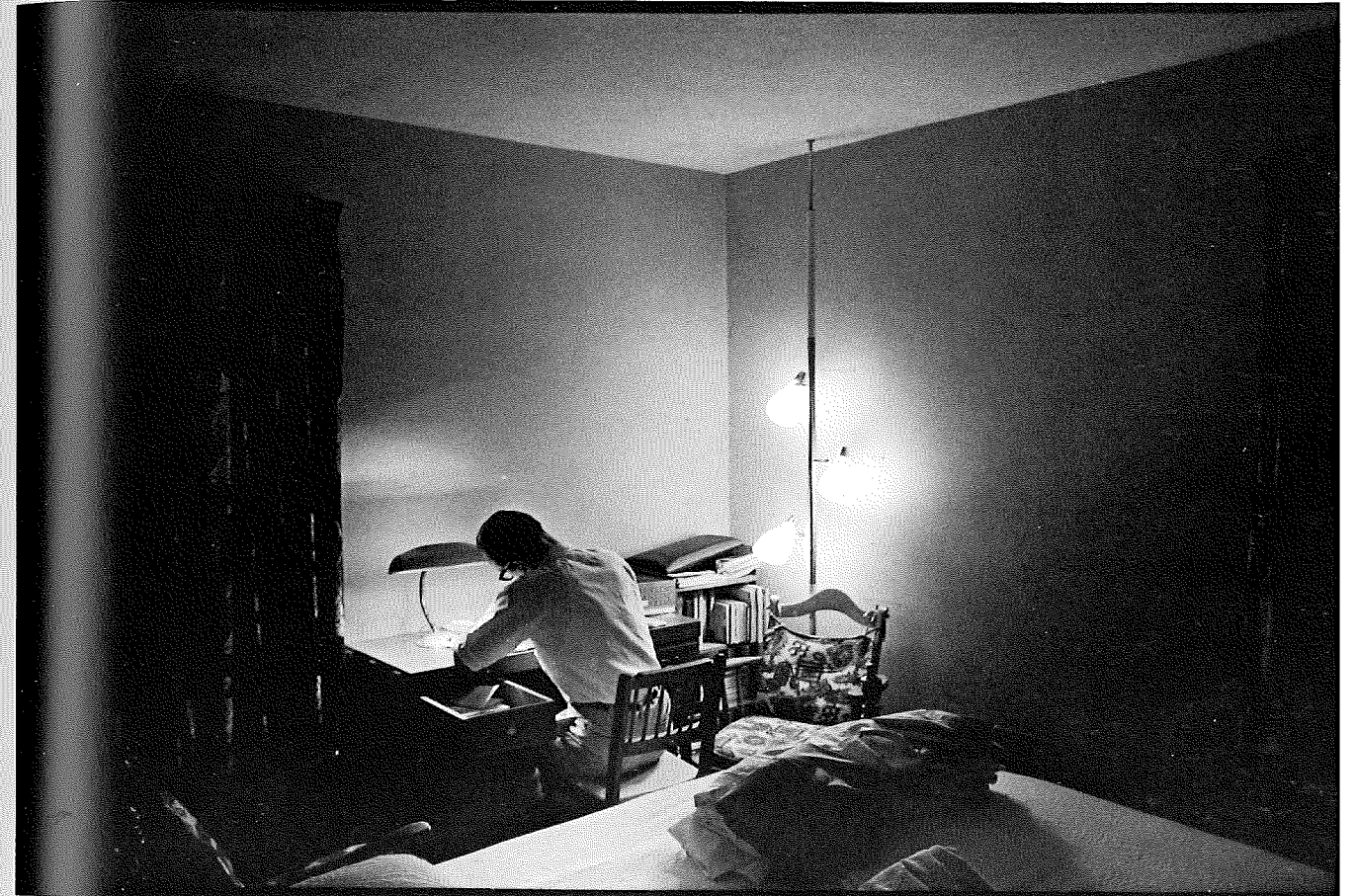


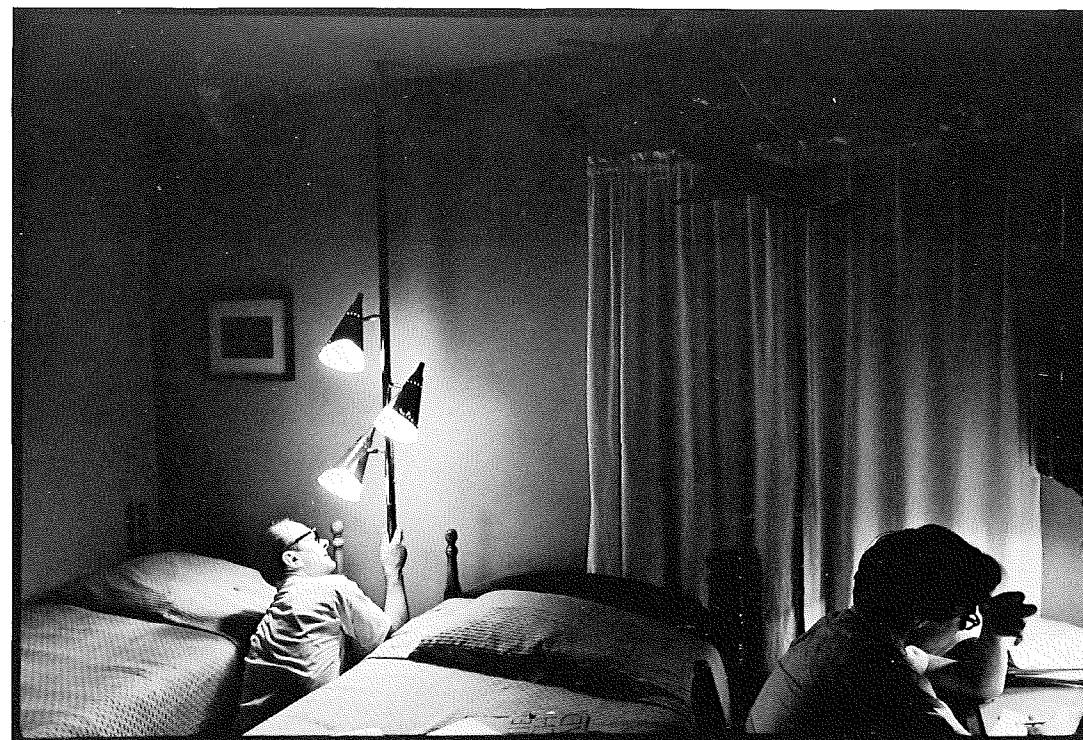
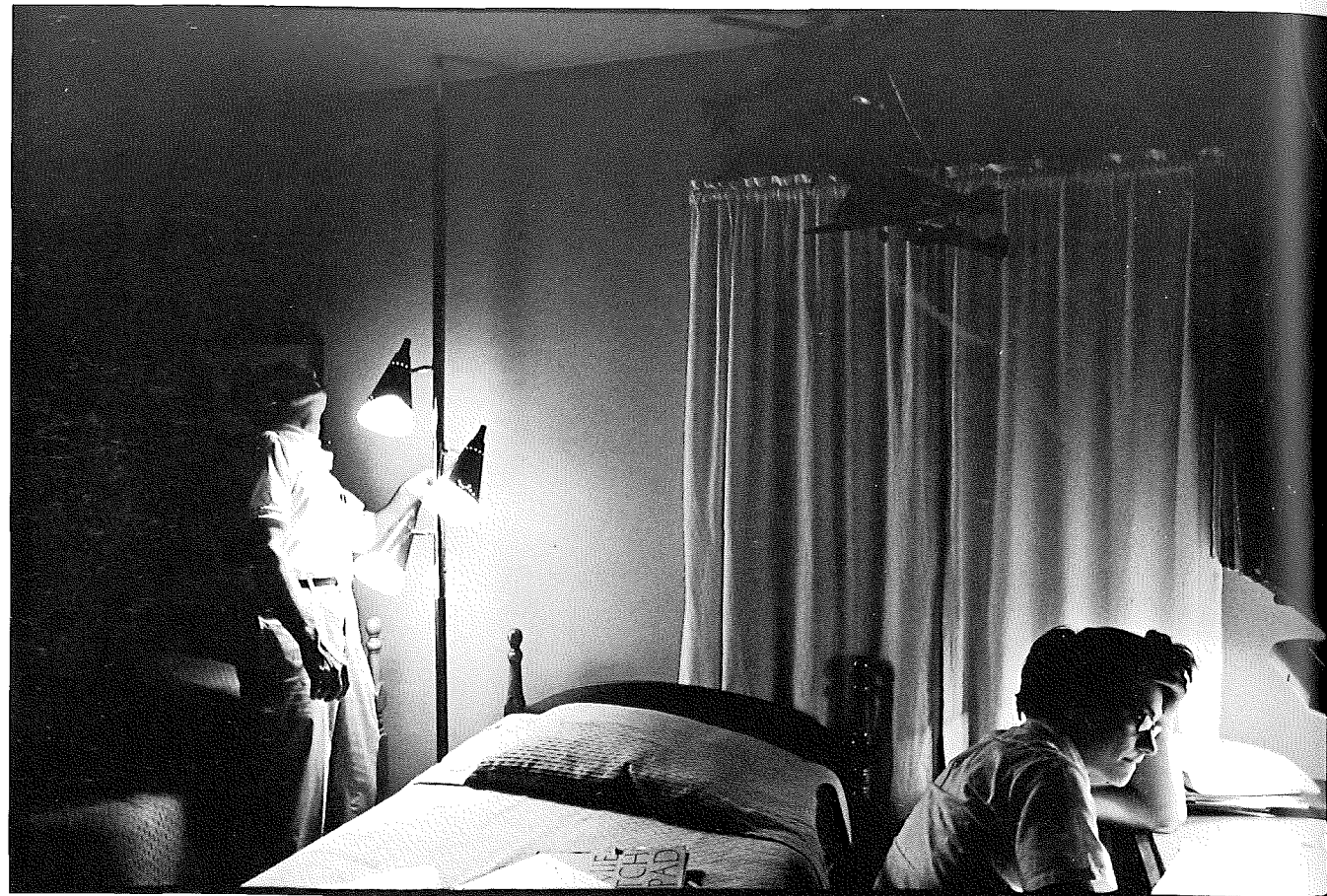


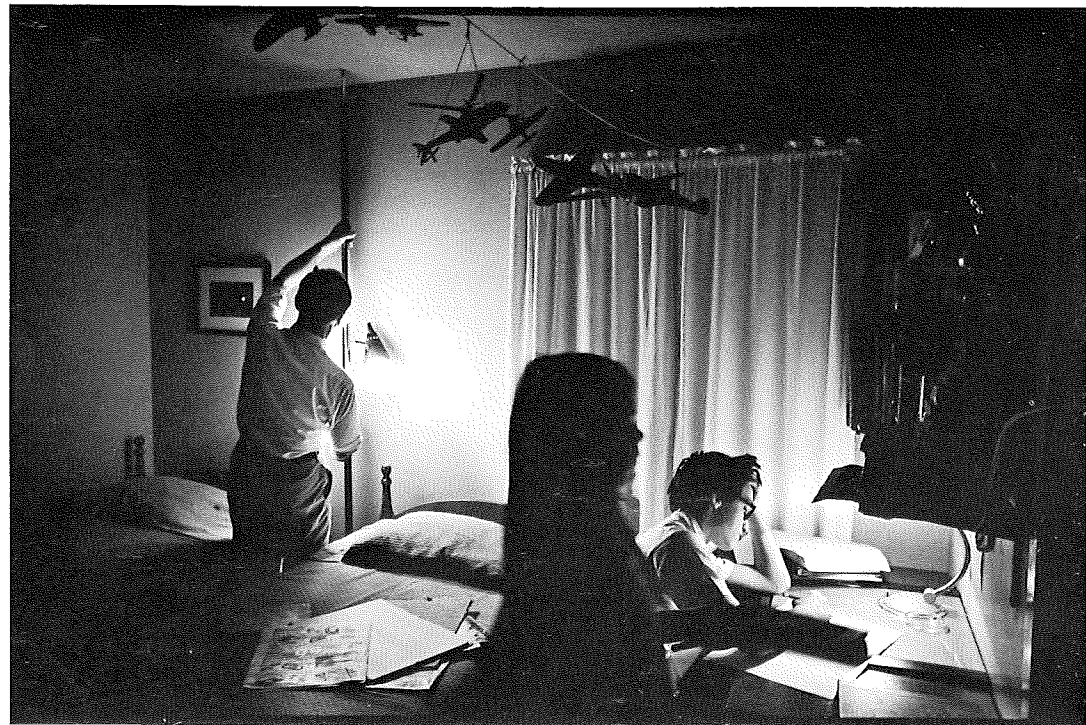
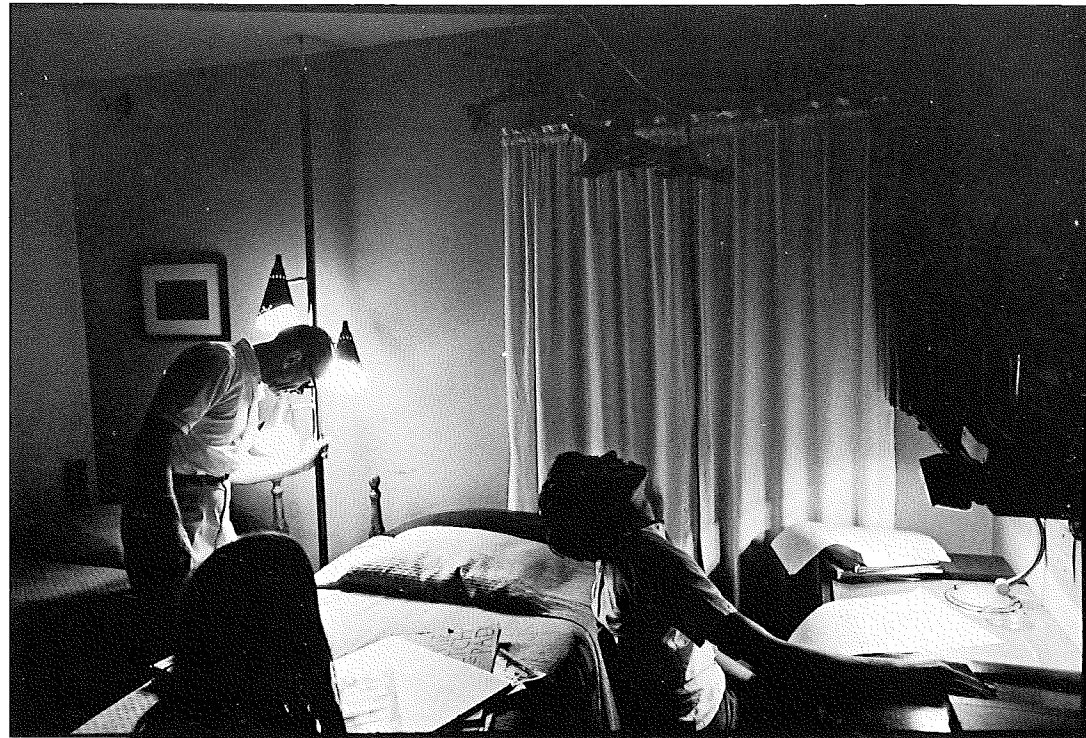


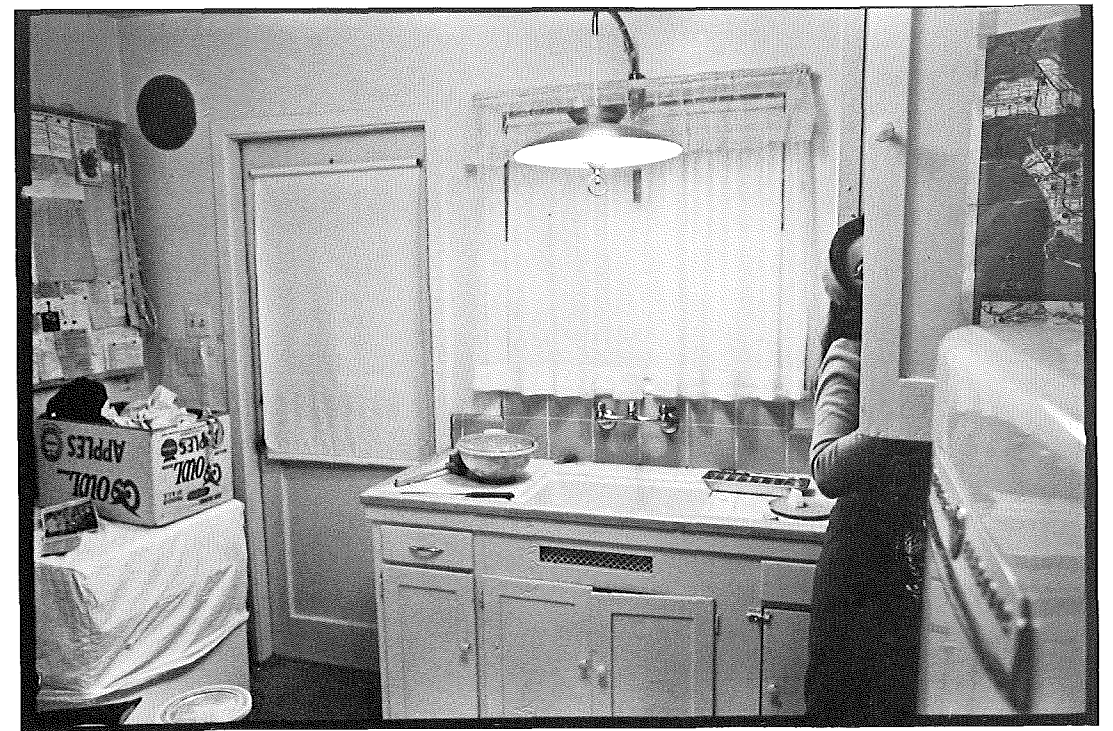
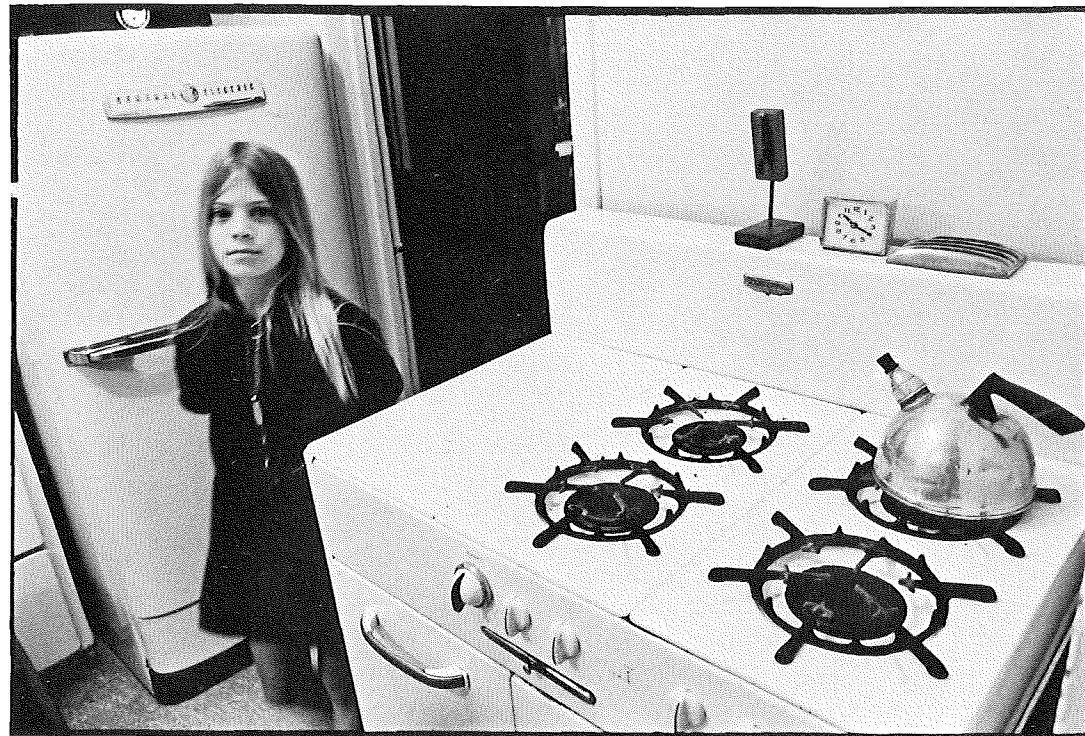
In the evening the engineer would write letters and straighten
the lamps.

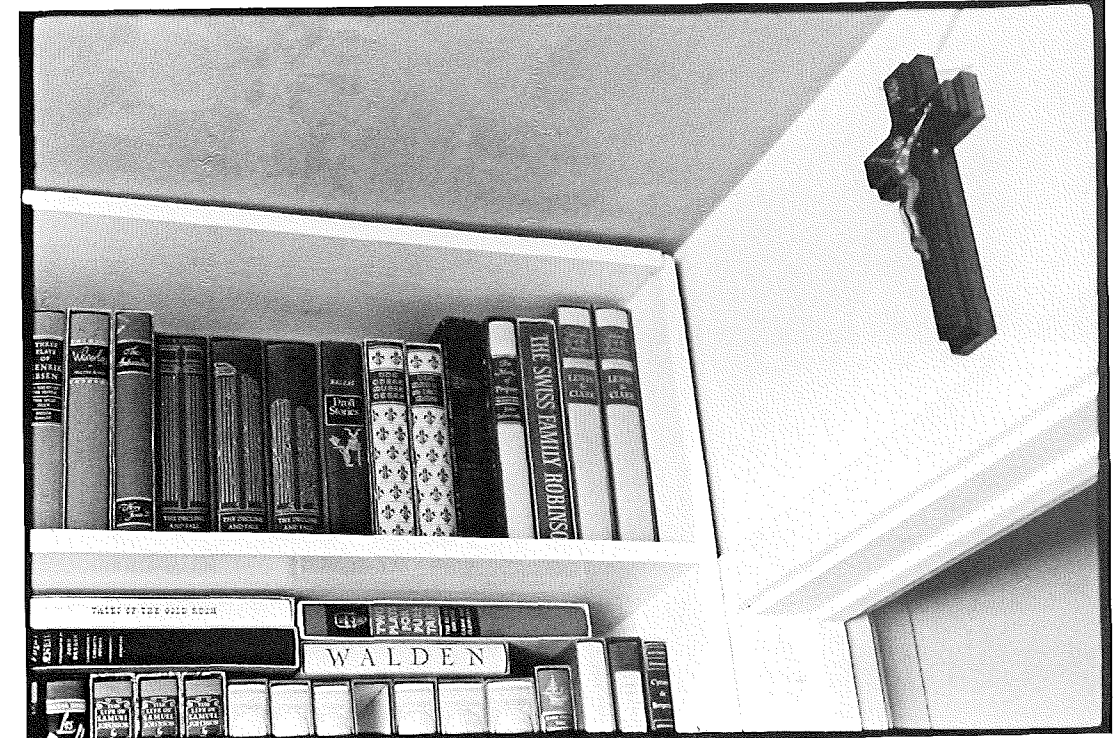
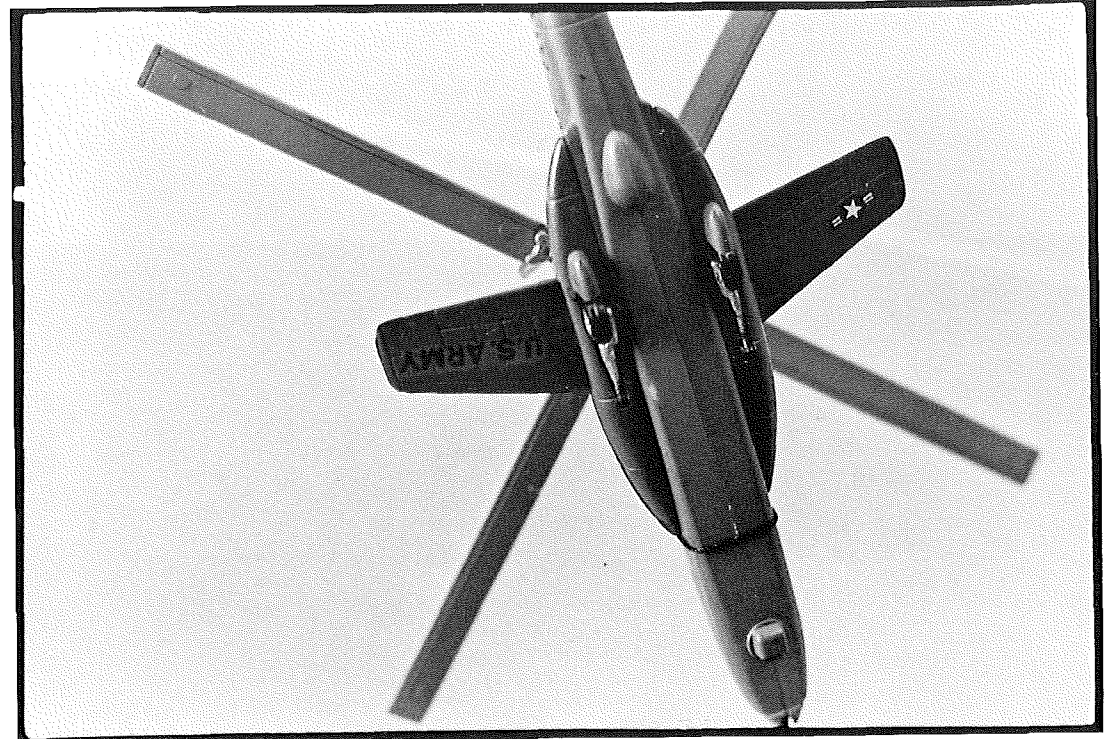
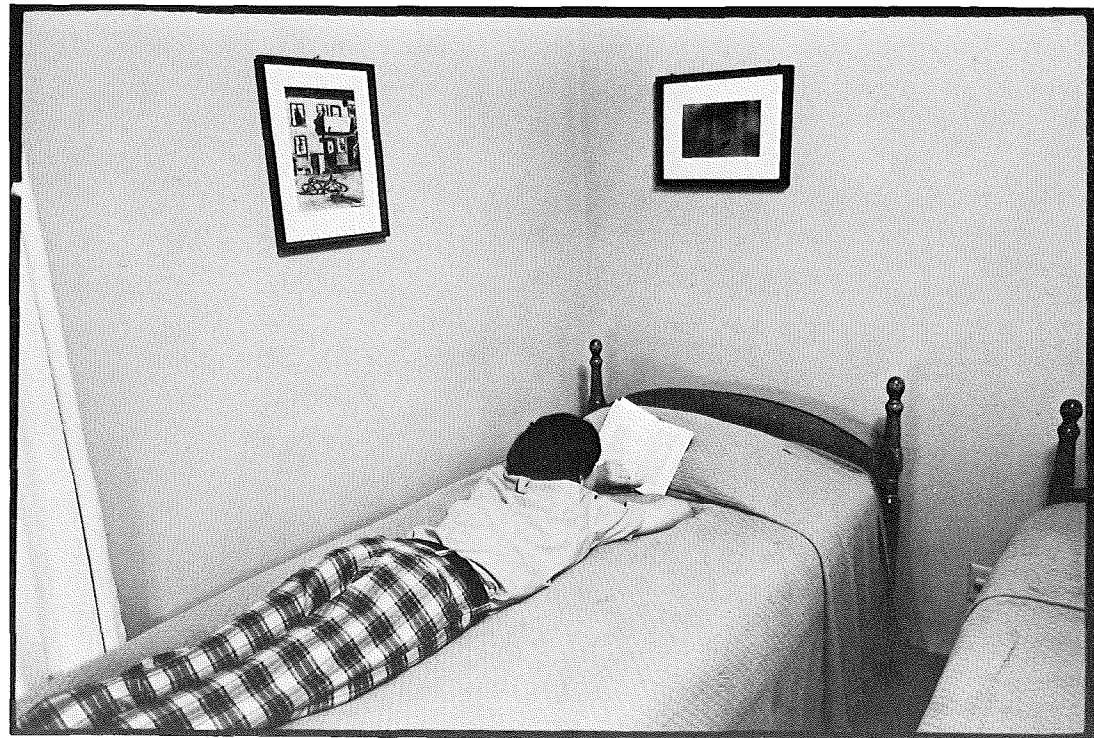
His wife would fix dinner.





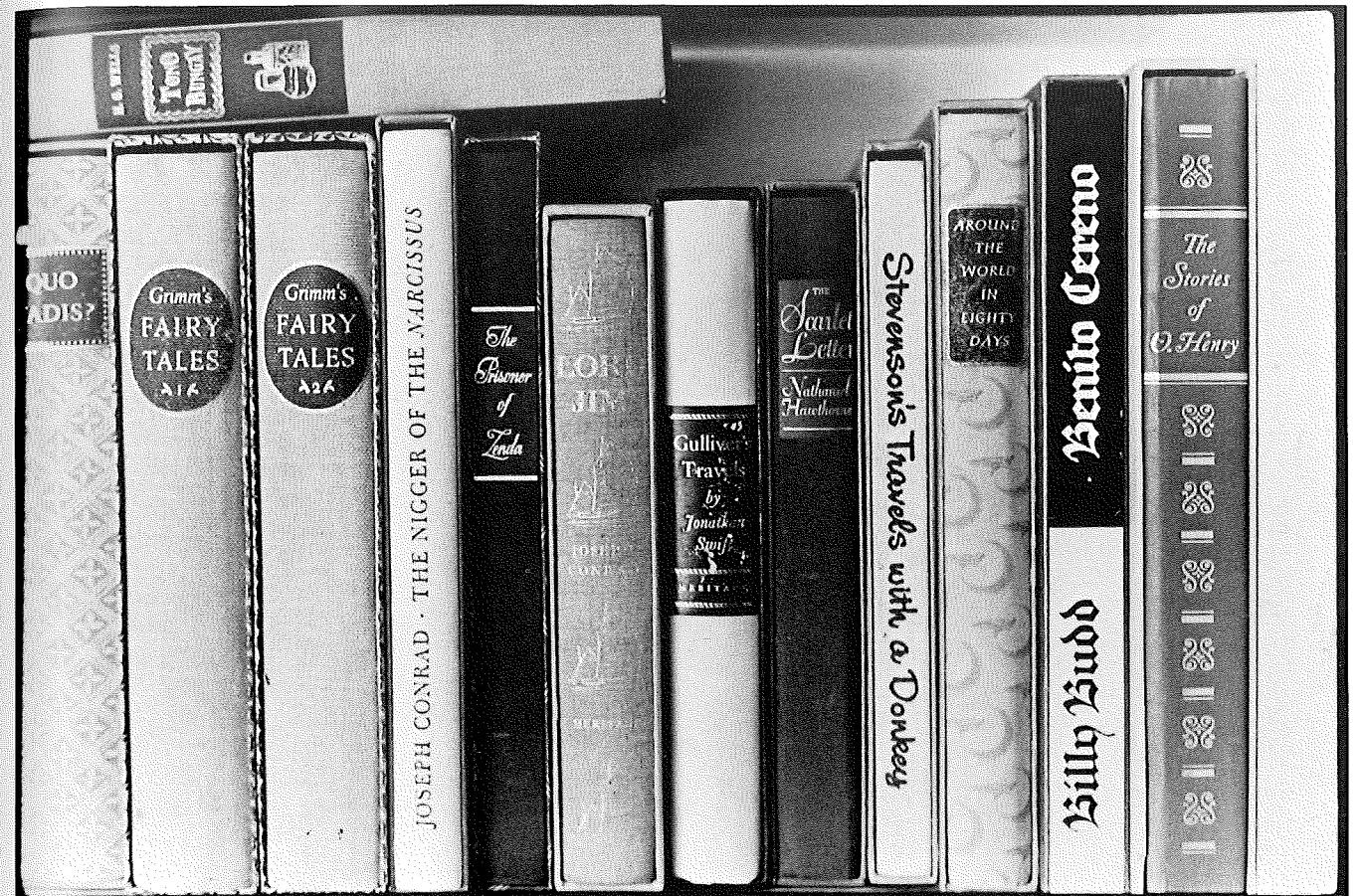






Every two weeks a new edition of great literature would arrive.

The engineer offered his children a dollar for every book they read.



At some point in his career the engineer studied the effects of nuclear weapons.

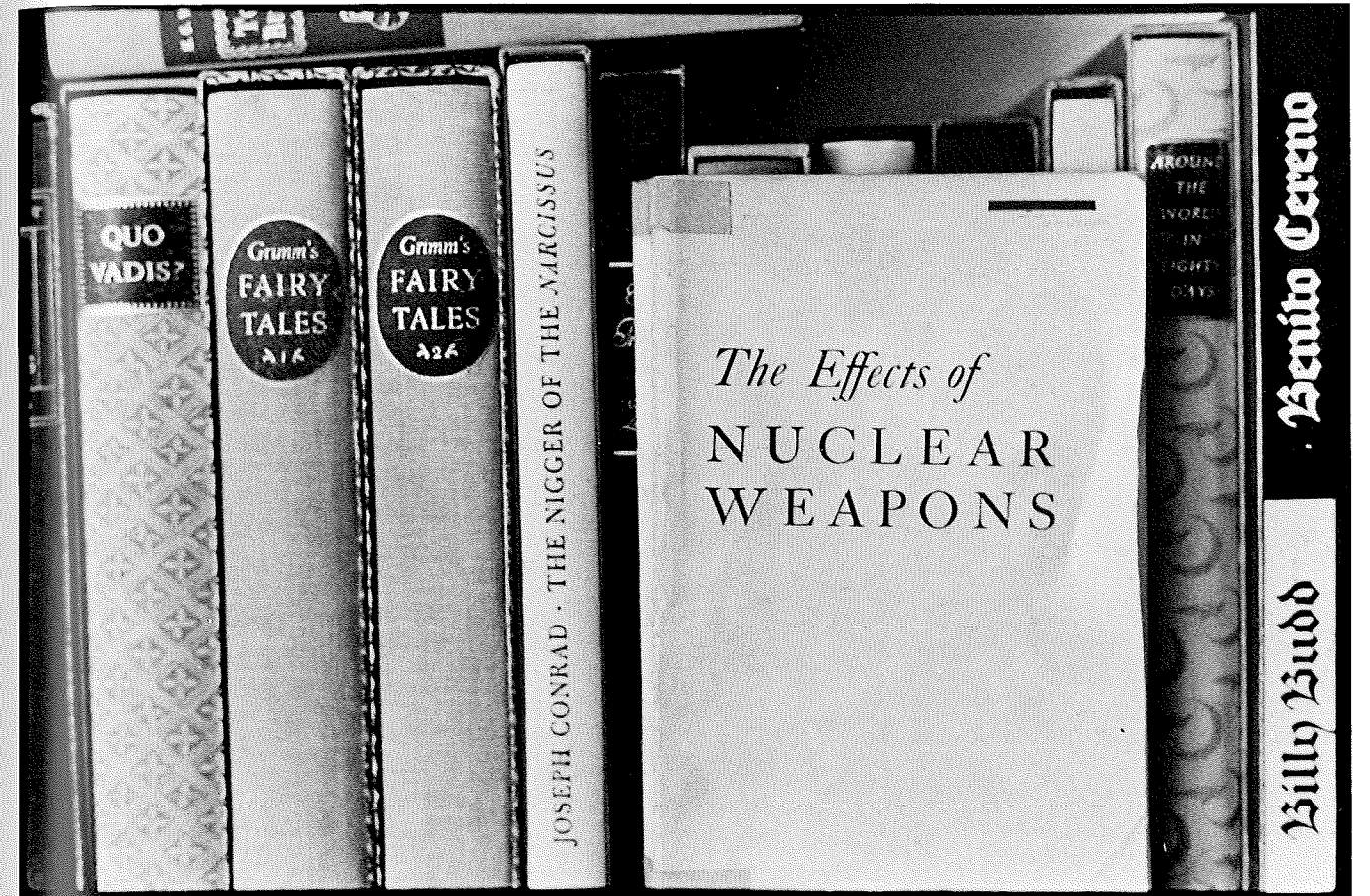




Figure 7.71. The skin under the areas of contact with clothing is burned. The protective effect of thicker layers can be seen on the shoulders and across the back.

as described in § 7.57, rather than to the direct effect of radiation. Areas over which the clothing fitted loosely, so that an air space separated it from the skin, were generally unharmed by the radiation (Fig. 7.71).

7.72 There were many instances in which burns occurred through black clothing, but not through white material worn by the same individuals (Fig. 7.72). This was attributed to the reflection of thermal radiation by white or other light-colored fabrics, whereas materials of dark color absorbed radiation, became hot, and so caused contact burns. In some cases black outer clothing actually burst into flame and ignited the undergarments, so that flame burns resulted. It should be recalled, however, as mentioned in § 7.57, that white clothing does not always necessarily provide protection against thermal radiation. Some materials of this kind transmit enough radiation to permit flesh burning of the skin to occur.

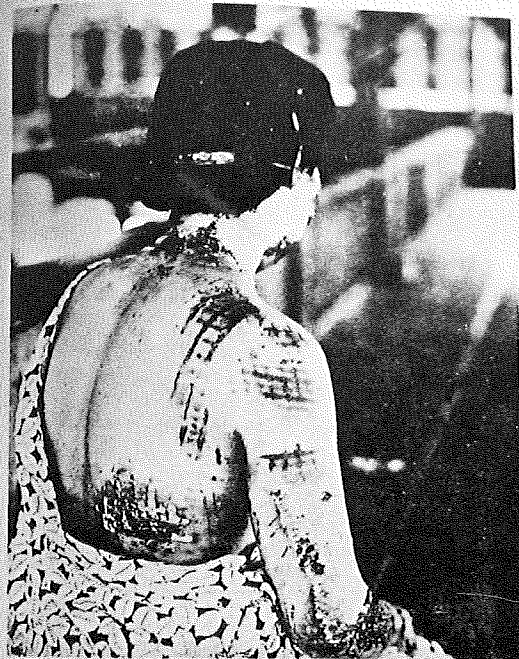


Figure 7.72. The patient's skin is burned in a pattern corresponding to the dark portions of a kimono worn at the time of the explosion.

OTHER EFFECTS OF THERMAL RADIATION



Figure 7.33. Thermal radiation from a nuclear explosion ignited the upholstery and caused fire to spread in an automobile, Nevada Test Site.

fective period of the radiation pulse, for ignition of the wood to occur. As will be seen later (§ 7.65), thin combustible material would probably have burst into flame at the same location.

7.35 The ignition of materials by thermal radiation depends upon a number of factors, the two most important, apart from the nature of the material itself, being the thickness and the moisture content. A thin piece of a given material, for example, will ignite more easily than a thick one, and a dry sample will be more readily damaged than one that is damp. The temperature may also be important, since ignition will be more difficult if the material is cold than if it were hot.

7.36 An important consideration in connection with charring and ignition of various materials and with the production of skin burns by thermal radiation is the rate at which the thermal energy is delivered. For a given total amount of thermal energy received by each unit area of exposed material, the damage will be greater if the energy is delivered rapidly than if it were delivered slowly. This means that, in order to produce the same thermal effect in a given material, the total amount of thermal energy (per unit area) received must be larger for a nuclear explosion of high yield than for one of lower yield, because the energy is delivered over a longer period of time, i. e., more slowly, in the former case.

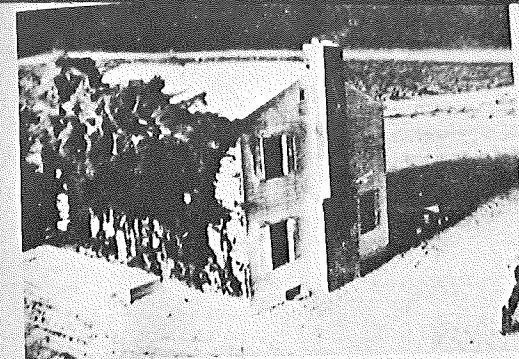


Figure 7.34a. Thermal effects on wood frame house almost immediately after explosion (about 25 cal/sq cm).

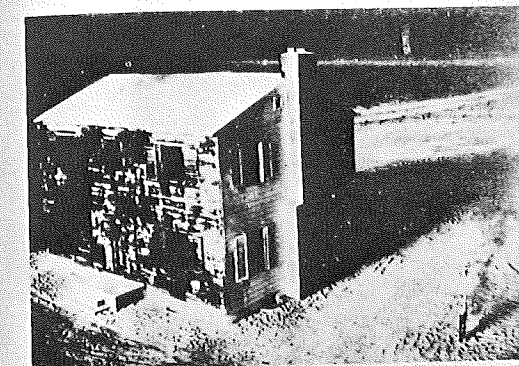


Figure 7.34b. Thermal effects on wood frame house 2 seconds later.

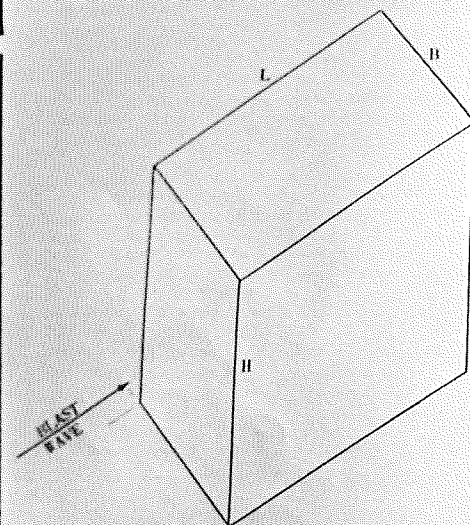


Figure 6.64. Representation of closed box-like structure.

6.66 (b) Average Loading on Sides and Top.—Although loading commences immediately after the blast wave strikes the front face, i.e., at $t=0$, the sides and top are not fully loaded until the wave has traveled the distance L in a time L/U .

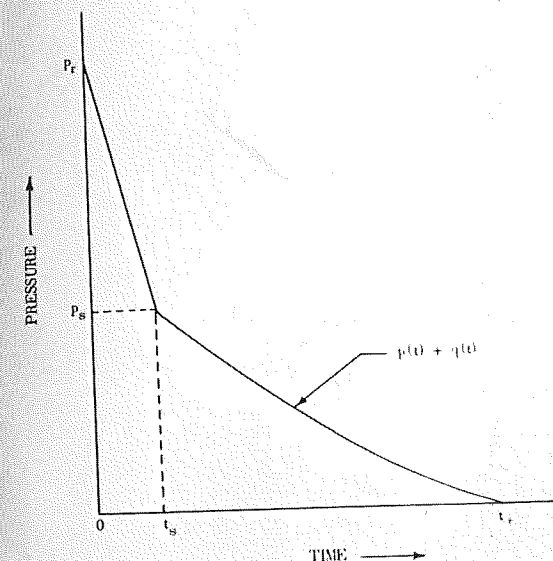


Figure 6.65. Average front face loading of closed box-like structure.

the drag coefficient on the sides and top of the structure being $-1/2$. The loading thus increases from zero at $t=0$ to the value p_s at the time L/U , as shown in Fig. 6.66. After this time the pressure at any time t is given by

Alma Pharmacy

2303 S. Alma
San Pedro, California

Tom Muranaka

Te 2-2147

DR. NATHAN FRIEDMAN

436 NORTH ROXBURY DR.
BEVERLY HILLS
274-5377 or 274-5378

SUITE 108

APPOINTMENTS

Fri Nov. 24 AT 3:00

JOHN F. NURSALL, M. D.

2163 TORRANCE BLVD.
TORRANCE, CALIFORNIA 90501
328-6022

Dr. Cole/Toria 1/18/72

1. Four deciduous premolars slow in shedding - ankylosis might be in progress.
2. About 6/18/72 (five months) call Cole's office and remind him to write letter to Nedleman reference to 1.
3. X-rays will indicate existence of ankylosis - if present, the four deciduous premolars will have to be removed.
4. Reference to front upper incisors an overbite exists and some malocclusion in the back teeth. Orthodontia may be indicated at a later date. Watch!

HAS AN APPOINTMENT WITH
GEORGE NEDLEMAN, D.D.S.
3663 TORRANCE BOULEVARD
TORRANCE, CALIFORNIA 90503

TELEPHONE 371-3002
FOR

MON. _____ AT _____
TUES. 7:00 AT 11:15
WED. _____ AT _____
call for Nov.

JAN. _____
FEB. 15
MAR. 17
APR. 20
MAY 1
JUNE 1
JULY 1



1966-1970 Manufacturing Research Engineer-Senior, Lockheed-California Co., Burbank, Calif. Conducted research and development programs to establish new or improved techniques, processes or plans, for the producibility of large scale aircraft structures. Research specifically dealt with chemical films for aluminum alloys, linear polyurethane-epoxy amine protective coating systems and technical evaluation of automated application techniques (electrostatic, hydraulic, conventional air, etc.) for metal bond adhesives. Limited work on electrocoating was completed. I also worked for about 12 years as a Materials and Processes Development Engineer-Senior. Duties included the monitoring of an independent R & D study contract on the effect of electrochemical machining and chemical milling on the mechanical properties of materials; preparation of design handbook and specifications on these processes; and the provision of liaison services and expert advice to the engineering and operations branches. Literature study on unconventional metal removal processes was also conducted.

1959-1966 Research Chemist, Turco Products, Inc. (Division of Purex Corp.) Wilmington, Calif. As a senior chemist and group leader investigated new approaches to the chemical descaling of aircraft gas turbine engines. Performed research and development on detergents, surfactants, alkaline rust removers, hydrogen diffusion, aluminum desmutting, ultrasonics, corrosion inhibition, nuclear decontaminants, sonoluminescence, classified AEC project, contact angle and surface chemistry, mechanisms of steam cleaning, heat treat coatings and chromic acid systems. Prepared research reports on all investigations completed.

1956-1959 Research Chemist, U. S. Air Force, Air Research and Development Command, Wright-Air Development Center, Materials Laboratory, WPAFB, Ohio. As a project engineer-chemist planned, initiated and conducted research and development work on protective processes. Monitored contract with outside research organization for a new non-cresylic carbon remover. Conducted internal research for development of a specification for high temperature alloy scale removers. Worked on safety solvents and refractory coatings. Conducted a literature study on beryllium. Prepared research reports on investigations.

1955-1956 Chemist, U. S. Air Force, Air Materiel Command, Directorate of Maintenance Engineering, Materials Laboratory, McClellan AFB, Calif. Performed professional chemistry duties on work related to organic chemistry within the various areas of the maintenance directorate. Designed chemical process control systems. Conducted analyses, tests and examinations independently or with the assistance of a lower grade chemist or laboratory aide.

1953-1955 Chemist, U. S. Department of Interior, Geological Survey, Quality of Water Laboratories, Salt Lake City, Utah and Sacramento, Calif. As an analytical chemist worked on special investigative projects pertaining to water chemistry utilizing instrumental, gravimetric and wet techniques.

1949-1950 Technical Editor (Copywriter), General Electric Co., Erie, Penna. Wrote instruction books on the operation and maintenance of electric locomotives.

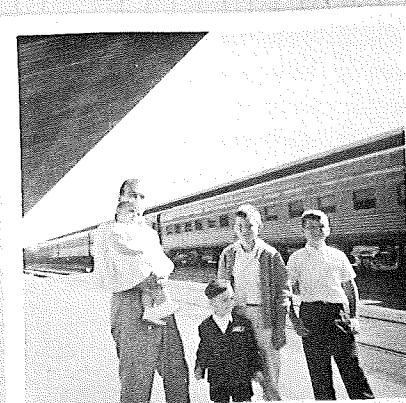
1946-1947 Training Officer, U. S. Veterans Administration, Oil City, Penna. Functioned as an area supervisor of training for veterans. Had direct supervision of office training staff. Assisted with radio publicity as an announcer.

1942-1946 Military Service, U. S. Army Air Corps. Enlisted and commissioned service - administrative and aircraft technical supply responsibilities.

1942 Instructor, U. S. War Department, Army Air Corps, Olmsted Field, Pa. Instructed military and civilian personnel in aircraft technical supply.

Penn State University, Bachelor of Science 1942, Chemistry-Physics-Math
Cannon College, 1930-1931, Chemistry and Bio-Sciences 1 1/2 years
Penn State University, 1938, High Polymer Symposium
Industrial College of the Armed Forces 1937-1939, Graduate
University of California at Los Angeles 1939, Corrosion Courses
U. S. Air Force Reserve, 1937 to present, Research & Development (Instructor)
U. S. Air Force Reserve, 1933-1934, Research & Development Symposium
Army Air Force Officer Candidate School, 1943, Graduate - Commission
Private tutoring, Fairborn, Ohio, 1938-1939, Russian. Polish self-taught

American Chemical Society
American Association for the Advancement of Science
Air Force Association
Air Force Reserve
Engineers and Scientists Guild
Penn State Alumni
Parent Teachers Association
YMCA - San Pedro and Peninsula Branch



Interview with the Engineer

You are more or less interested in knowing what some of the background was to the present economic condition, as far as aerospace work is concerned? The layoffs and so forth?

Well, quite a bit contributed toward this present situation. There have been a number of military contracts cancelled, because of the economy moves on the part of our federal government. And of course, with these contracts cancelled, many of our major aerospace corporations were forced to lay off quite a number of their professional-technical personnel. This project curtailment very definitely had a strong impact on a healthy aerospace employment picture.

We have in this country today a problem that is not limited to one particular area. We have the Los Angeles, the Southern California area, we have the Seattle area, we have the Boston-New York complex, the Philadelphia complex, we have the Florida area, all these locations were the geographical centers for a very large number of trained, professional scientists and engineers who worked on various aerospace projects. The situation in these centers is extremely acute. You have hundreds of people applying for the limited jobs that exist. A lot of these people are highly trained with Ph.D.'s. and master's degrees, and they will compete for the job which only requires a bachelor's level. So now, the fellow with the bachelor's degree is not only faced with the problem of competing with his peers, but he is now finding himself burdened with competition from those who have higher degrees than he has. And this makes the problem much, much greater.

Perhaps the major difficulty that I have encountered, is being able to contact people who might have knowledge of positions which you could fill. Many times, you were sidetracked by receptionists, office personnel, clerical staff, and so forth, especially if you visited a corporation or business establishment or government agency. Letter writing is not as effective either, because many times people would not take the time to thoroughly scrutinize and evaluate the potential of a man's background. And they would maybe read one or two sentences, and jump at a conclusion, "This isn't the person we want," and throw it in the wastebasket, or file it.

Let me be more explicit in what I mean. Mostly, there are two types of resumes. You have a chronological resume, which is a sort of a capsule description in writing of what your experience has been in the various fields that you've worked. And it's usually a series of small paragraphs, beginning with the latest job, and going back to the first job that you ever held. Then there is the functional resume, which, as its name implies, gives you an idea of what a man's total background is, in a sort of a narrative description. It may be one paragraph, it may be two paragraphs. But it is not dated at all. It does not say, "From such and such a year I worked at such and such a place."

I remember encountering a rather vexing problem with one of the large aircraft corporations here in the Los Angeles area. I came up to a man who had been in the field for quite a while, and I presented a chronological resume to him. He looked at it, and in a few seconds, after reading the first two or three lines, he gave it back, and he said, "You're not qualified for any of the openings that we have." And I realized right away that the man was jumping at conclusions and was not properly evaluating the single sheet resume

which I gave him. The fact that he made an instant evaluation from reading only the first one or two sentences indicated that he did not know the difference between a chronological and a functional resume. Because it is impossible to pass judgment on a man's background in reading the first few lines of a chronological resume. A functional resume, perhaps. And I pointed this out to him, and I said, very carefully, "That is a chronological resume, and you should, perhaps, read the rest of it before you pass judgement on it." And he took another look at it, and admitted finally, "Well, I didn't realize this was a chronological resume."

There is a demoralizing reaction on the part of the individual experiencing unemployment. At first, he might feel very confident that he has something that will impress a potential employer. And as time goes on and when he is faced with refusal after refusal, he begins to doubt, and then that doubt turns into what you might call a discouragement. You just don't care whether you are going to continue on any more looking for a job — it is a futile waste of time. And it takes a terrific amount of persistence, you might say, or call it intestinal fortitude. . . .

Many of these professional employees who have been let out within the last two or three years have had to make a very serious adjustment as far as economics are concerned. A lot of them could not maintain the high standards of living which they had been accustomed to and which they're entitled to. House payments which amounted to a considerable amount of money either had to be postponed, or some arrangements made where they could be stretched over a longer period of time, or completely cancelled. Purchases which they had anticipated making, plans for vacations, enlargement of their homes, renovations, repairs — all of these had to be curtailed.

And it's been quite a strain on families, particularly the marriages, especially if you did not have a strong marriage to begin with. There were serious repercussions from this type of situation, because some people were not able to adjust to the serious economic retrenchment.

Professional people have experience which cannot be marketed easily today, because if you do not have research and development programs, then you cannot hire these people, unless you hire them for jobs other than what they are highly trained in. However, I wish to make one point clear: these people are capable of adapting themselves to many, many different types of jobs. A good scientist and engineer, with his organizing ability, his preciseness, his ability to adapt to different situations, can be of great value in administrative positions and clerical tasks — checking procedures, and assisting in systems analyses.

For example, we're faced with a problem today among the welfare agencies where there have been accusations that there's been a misuse of public funds. And granted, there must be a certain percentage of people receiving aid — taxpayers' money — who do not deserve it, who have either lied or have misrepresented facts. And this is a burden upon the taxpayer. A legitimate claim is something else, but where there is fraud, intentional or unintentional, this should be investigated and checked.

It requires a certain amount of investigation of the person's background, his finances, and so forth, to pin down any potential fraud. Here is a great field for the utilization of professional people. You must remember that these people need jobs, they have to have an income, they are either existing on unemployment, loans, or they are rapidly exhausting

their resources. If you could organize these people into groups, to go out and check some of these records, you would gain two ways. You would be able to give a well-earned salary to these unemployed engineers and scientists, and you would also be able to save a tremendous amount of money.

Another potential use of unemployed people is in various municipal organizations and in the field of environmental control. A tremendous amount of publicity has been given to the problem of ecology. Everybody said that we are on an ecological binge. We are going to reform the whole United States and make it safe to breathe again, make our streams fit to bathe in, make water more drinkable, and our environment more fit to live in. Actually, what has been done? Only the surface has been scratched. All this publicity, all this ballyhoo, all this talk. Surveys upon surveys being conducted at terrific expense. And yet, when a professional individual with a science or engineering background applies for a job with some of these environmental organizations, they answer back and say "We have already filled our quota as far as new personnel is concerned, and we are not hiring anymore." But what is most discouraging is to pick up a newspaper and read that this particular problem exists because we do not have the talent or the people to do the job. The Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency are two organizations in particular guilty of these conclusions. A large number of scientists and engineers could be hired to supervise groups to do some of the work which would enhance our environment.

Let me be more specific. You go into the boroughs of East Los Angeles, or go down into the fringe of the Watts area, down in central Los Angeles, and you will see a pitiful accumulation of garbage and filth in the streets, in the back alleys, in the vacant lots. You might say, so what? You could use a lot of these trained professional people to take over groups of workers who are on welfare and get trucks and tools and equipment and rake up these vacant yards, load this trash and garbage, haul it out to suitable dumping areas, and clean up and enhance the environment. All this would fall in line with the great ecology movement that was so highly publicized.

Of course, the question immediately comes to mind, who's going to pay for this? If you look at the records of our foreign aid program, there have been millions and millions spent and unfortunately, much of the funds are abused, channeled into rather questionable projects. Well, the point is this: simply divert these funds from foreign aid, cut back further, and pay for projects such as I just described.

Well, probably one of the most extreme cases of U.S. foreign aid is the support of the Thieu government in South Vietnam. Do you feel that the continuation of the war in Vietnam has had a negative effect on the economy?

I want to answer that with certain reservations. I did not want to get involved in this discussion. I would say that there is a misuse of funds in Vietnam, if there is poor planning, poor strategy, or the programs are conducted under influence of political groups, civilian pressure organizations, businessmen, and so forth, who have their own personal interest, and who have enough influence to sway our military people to use poor judgment in their operations. If this particular condition exists, I would say that there is a definite

abuse of public funds. In other words, if there is mismanagement in the conduct of the war, I say: stop it, retrench completely, and get out. As far as supplying arms to other nations, the question always comes up: why didn't these nations help us directly in the war? You could count on the fingers of one hand the countries that have actually helped us in fighting this war. And yet we have given so much to so many nations under our foreign aid program. If we aren't all together in opposing communism, in halting aggressiveness on the part of North Vietnam, then what is the purpose of furnishing any foreign aid? I'm not condemning the entire program. Economic programs — to rehabilitate, to give these nations a chance to produce economically — all indirectly are supposed to be of benefit to us. This is fine, but where there is a downright misuse and abuse of the public funds we furnish, I'd say those should be channeled toward assisting many of our unemployed people here in this country, particularly the professionals.

What worries me more than anything else is the fact that we are de-emphasizing technological supremacy, we are ignoring completely the necessity of research and development, we are coasting along on the know-how which has developed over a period of years; but it is only a question of when we are going to run out of information. We constantly are being challenged for foreign competition, and it is only a matter of time before that competition may stifle our technological superiority. Many of them are borrowing our industrial know-how, compressing into a few years what took us decades to gain.

Industry is only interested, it seems, in profit-producing activity. Today, anything directed toward information, that does not produce a tangible entity, is anathema, as far as industry is concerned. They don't want to talk about research. They're interested in production for production's sake: "How much? How many dollars will this bring in?" This can be fatal, economically. Our military supremacy, our economic superiority, and even our emotional stability can be seriously threatened by this type of philosophy.

Interview with the Engineer's Wife

Oh, he goes through his spells of being disturbed and upset, but not as much as he would if it had been unexpected. He anticipated it, and saw it coming, and felt we were going to have this layoff. He felt, I don't know why he knew it, but he wasn't surprised. I think he was a little chagrined that for the first time in his life, well, he'd always been able to sell himself. He could always, when he got into an interview, and got to talk to somebody, he could make a good impression, he could convince them that he was doing something. But what he ran into was this screening out, this shunting people aside.

There's this attitude, if a man is out of a job, there's something wrong with him. We went through this same unemployment kind of thing, years and years ago. More than twenty years ago. We found one of the hard things to do was to have employed members of your family start giving you advice, because they could in no way conceive of why you're out of work. The standard reaction was, "Well, you're too proud to take something, you set your standards too high; if it were me, I wouldn't be without money, I'd take the first job that comes along." We heard that over and over again, "You're putting too high a price on your services. You gotta bend, you gotta bend." And then, if you were out of work for any length of time, then there was the, "Well, he's got a pretty good education, yeah, he was a hard worker, but there must be something wrong. Nobody will hire him."

Only for a short period of time during the space race — building the missiles, getting the Saturn up there — that's when industry began to pay men to think. But there never has been true support of research, true support of men who, if they had a few dollars, if they had a laboratory, if they had a place to experiment . . . maybe something would come of the idea in their head.

Businessmen have a tendency to look at those ideas and say, "How many dollars will it pay? Where's the product we can sell?" They don't like the idea of a cumulative storing up of information that might be useful ten years from now, or twenty years from now, that might add to what the world knows. They want something we can sell right now. But if something doesn't succeed right away, you drop it. It is wiped out.

So, this is what your father sensed, when he saw the recession coming. He saw that research and development was being fazed out. So he knew that he had to start looking for something else. And we had learned long ago that it's easier to go from one job to another, than to get into a job when you're unemployed.

So he started looking for something, and the first thing that came along paid more money than the job he had. Knowing it was not going to last too long, he took the [Lockheed] job and had lasted in it four years when the federal government began to look at contracts, and began to charge that the company was wasting the taxpayers' money. And then the company got into a serious financial bind, and began laying off. And in their laying off, they went after older men, they went after men who were not too far from pensions, because the pensions were going to cost them money. What happens to that money the company put into a pension fund? Who does it belong to? It belongs to the company, because it's their money. What happens to the man? Well, that's his problem.

The most shaking thing for us was to suddenly realize that we had lost almost half of

our life insurance, granted it was company paid, but still it was life insurance. And we had lost all of our hospitalization insurance. So when Brian broke his arm and we discovered that the school claimed no responsibility for it, we were going to have to dig down and find the four hundred dollars to pay for it, and we didn't have it. We followed our standard pattern of going to get the best medical care. We hadn't tried the public health agencies. We have since. I've tried the V.A. hospital, and I find it a rather odd experience, to be in a clinic atmosphere, and yet one for which I am very grateful, because when my doctor tells me I need a five hundred dollar examination, I don't have the money to pay for it.

Well, I think the main things are the medicine aspect, the insecurity, and having to listen to people tell you what to do, when you'd already done it millions and millions and millions of times, but they thought they were telling you something you had neglected, and forgotten, or didn't know about. People would say, "Can't you get a job with the government? Can't you get a job teaching school, can't you get a job working at the refinery?" That seemed to be a standard one. And then when you go down to the refinery — well, you know, you tried to get a job with the refinery — you can't get past the guard at the gate. He won't let you inside. And if you do get inside, then they have their standard answer. To the older men, "We only hire men just out of school." And I don't know what they told the boy just out of college. They probably told him, "We only hire experienced men." These personnel men seem to sit there in this position of power, and I think they sort of enjoy being able to say to people, "We're not hiring."

In industry, there's a great deal of calling people and saying, "Look, there's a job opening up." And these people with the inside track are the ones who get into it. The man who knows no one, who has very few acquaintances, is practically doomed to unemployment.

* * *

A lot of people who served in World War II hung onto the idea that they were going into business for themselves when they got out. It was sort of a dream to keep you going until the whole thing was over, and you were out of the tired rat races, the locked-in kind of living that you did in the military. These useless jobs that were part of the war effort that needed to be done, certainly weren't very stimulating or exciting or at all what perhaps you'd dreamed about when you thought about going off to fight a war. But there was this idea, "I'm going to have a business of my own."

I remember I even caught the germ. I'd seen some New England craft shops and hand-work things, and of all the people in the world, I'm the least craft-like. I don't make things well, I'm just not very good at it. But I liked the idea of a little store, and I suddenly started visualizing the little store that belonged to my family, that had never harbored anything except a meat market, or a blacksmith shop, or I guess it had had some office supplies in it at one time. I pictured that as one of these quaint little New England craft shops, where I would go out and find handcraft work and sell it, or maybe a bookstore, and stationary on the side, and my mother could help me run it — she was very good at knitting — and I did things like go into Brentano's bookstore and buy little books on how to do your own business.

Now shirt-sleeves was my background. I didn't have the least talent, or the least

training for it. But I dreamed that dream. And then when I met my future husband, he was dreaming a little of the same dream, too. He wanted to go out and look at some sections of the country and maybe start a business. There was one idea I never could quite see, but he talked about a little specialty shop, a little lingerie shop, or accessories, because he knew somebody who had one like that, who was highly successful. He talked about advertising-display work, things like that. And we looked, but it was just not the right time, the right atmosphere. And I think many of the people who dreamed that kind of dream just gave it up and naturally went into a job of some kind. But there were so many who took what they might have saved, war bonds, paychecks they'd put away, and invested in a business. Some of them succeeded, a few; most of them failed, and usually failed because they didn't know much about bookkeeping. I heard about one family right here in the neighborhood who made it. Went into business, were successful. But they forgot to put aside the social security money, and when the time came, they didn't have the money and they couldn't borrow, and went bankrupt.

There were other people who had little inventions. One man who was a machinist figured out this spun-aluminum cup — like a cocktail shaker — and the ladies washed their hose, and they put their hose into this cocktail shaker with a little detergent and shook it up, and they wouldn't get runs, and their hose would last longer. And he took everything he had and sunk it into that, and it didn't work. Nobody bought his little cocktail shaker. And that was the end of his enterprise.

What kind of adjustments do people have to make when they realize that they're going to work for big industries?

I think they begin to look for other things. Usually along with beginning to work for industry, they begin to have a family, or they get into buying a house, or maybe they're getting into the gardening thing, where you spend all your time out there with the hoe, waiting for the weeds to come up, and pouring on fertilizers.

I don't think they think too much about it, I mean, you get into a routine. But of course, I can't speak too well for that, because I haven't really worked. I've only watched people who work. And when I say I haven't really worked, I mean I've done a lot of jobs for short periods. Except for working for the government [in the Navy during World War II], I don't think I ever worked anywhere where I was caught in a trap. I know someone who worked in a Navy office, this huge office with little compartments made with filing cabinets. And she shuffled papers all day long, and she thought it was useless, and not much good to anybody, and she put some papers in the wrong file once, and a sailor's records ended up in the office for dead people. He was still alive, and I used to worry about it. Kept asking, "Did you ever tell anybody you did it? Did you ever try to get them back?" She said, "No, I didn't want to." And I've often thought about that poor sailor, and wondered where he is now? If he was officially dead as far as the records were concerned, did he ever get to come back, get a resurrection? But she felt that she'd cause more damage by admitting that she had accidentally killed someone off, than by just letting it go. She said, "I'm going to get out and I'll never find out."

When Dad worked for G.E., at the same time that he was working in the technical

writing department, Uncle Alphonse was working on the production line. He did something like evacuating the refrigeration units down to as near-perfect vacuum as you could. And he was very proud of what he did, but they also did a lot of horsing around on the job, the young fellows just out of the service. And he used to say, "Never buy a G.E. refrigerator. If it's one I worked on, it probably won't work." Their life was a matter of going to work, spending your eight hours, getting through it as well as you could without being too unhappy about it, and then going out and drinking beer and watching TV in the bars, because TV was just starting then, and people didn't have it in their homes. He won a TV set while we lived there. He bought a chance at a lodge. And when he went down to collect his prize, the members of the lodge came up to him and said, "You know, we sort of like that TV set, we got used to it, it's nice to have it here in the hall. If you want we'll buy it from you." So he jumped the chance to get some cash, and he bought his first new car, with that as the down payment. And I remember how excited and happy he was. He said he'd never had anything but a second-hand car, a run down car, one that always had to be repaired and patched up, and suddenly he had enough money to buy a new car. He got himself a new Ford, I think, a 1950 Ford, and to him that was one of the highlights of his life. He bought a ticket, he won a prize, and because of it, he got his Ford.

Well, I'm going to mess your tape up because I went off the track. But there were other people who worked in that office where Dad did, there were certain hierarchies of business, certain things that you ran into. We found many times in the changing around that there are certain people who feel that because they've spent years and years with a company and slowly made their way up to the top, that everybody else should do the same thing. They don't want a man to come in and quickly succeed. They want him to go through the long painful apprenticeship, the low pay, and the slow climb to the top. They want him to work with the idea, "If you're a good boy, and you do your job, someday, you're going to have my job, and be up where I am." And I think a lot of that's vanished in recent years, but in government service, in industry, and even in the stores, you had this attitude, you've got to take it easy, work your way up, and prove that you can do something, prove you've got something, before you deserve to be at my level, and be up here with us higher-paid, more experienced men with seniority.

Of course, I grew up with seniority. Lived in a railroad town, and there was a definite hierarchy of seniority in the railroad. You had a position based on your length of service. And when there was a layoff, which came fairly frequently, because it was a seasonal job — when the lakes froze, the railroads stopped running, only a few trains went, instead of the rush-rush of summer season and spring — there would be a certain number of railroad men who would be laid off during the winter and have to survive as best they could, because there was no relief, no social security, no unemployment then.

That was one reason that people had their little farms that help carry them over. The farms weren't very productive, but at least there was milk, vegetables and things that they could live on. Some of them had little businesses that their wives ran, like a corner grocery store. There was always some kind of extra thing they did to make money, in addition to their job during the layoff times. But I can remember hearing them say, "I was bumped" — railroad slang for the fact that when the layoff came, somebody with more seniority than you took your job, and you either bumped the man below you or you just kept right on going. I think the analogy comes from switching the train, just as you bump the car off, so you were the one who was bumped off the end of the train.

A Commentary

this art here is about other people's art that is the art i grew up with generically speaking it's white collar art it's lower-level technocrat art it's southern california aerospace engineer art it's government contract art it's 10,000-15,000 dollar a year art it's sacrifice and denial art it's petty-bourgeois art which is not to say that the artists own small businesses or anything they just act like they do because they own something that used to be as good as a small business or at least a franchise which is a college education but we all know where that gets you nowadays

now specifically speaking i'm talking about my parents' art in other words i'm talking about art that is generated out of a specific history my father was born in 1914 in a pennsylvania railroad town my mother was born in 1920 in another pennsylvania railroad town my father's parents were polish immigrants his father was an illiterate skilled craftsman his mother cooked pheasants for rich people's weddings in the old country which means that they were what we call working class now my mother's parents were what we call working class too her father was a fireman and her mother was a maid for some rich people in cleveland before she got married anyway my father took seven years to get through college because it was the depression and he had to drop out every year to earn enough money for the next my father got his degree in chemistry and got drafted because it was world war two well he worked his way up from buck private to lieutenant an achievement of which he is very proud because like getting through college it wasn't easy so after the way my father married my mother he wanted to go to medical school but i was born and money was scarce so he went to work as a painter and a bartender and finally as a chemist for the government so years later he was working for lockheed aircraft corporation as a materials engineer and due to some rather disturbing tendencies in the national economy he got laid off

now getting laid off is no big deal i mean people get laid off every day machinists get laid off pizza cooks get laid off secretaries get laid off but this was the first time experts were getting laid off of course we'd seen this kind of thing before on a smaller scale boeing would periodically dump engineers in seattle and convair would periodically dump engineers in san diego but those were one company towns and those kinds of things were expected this time things were a lot worse all over the country people were getting laid off lockheed and north american rockwell and honeywell and martin marietta and hughes and trw and boeing were laying off specialists they were laying off professionals they were laying off research and development men these guys were highly trained and everybody was freaking out

so i'm a smart kid i think well when the system stops delivering the goods that's when people start wondering what's going on i figure what's my father's art going to look like when things get tight i mean how is he going to represent himself when management tells him he's expendable now that may sound callous but i've got to understand these things after all what about my future i mean i better be prepared for the future say i'm an art engineer for some corporation making paintings or tv shows or photographs or something a specialist and i get laid off what am i going to do am i going to buckle down and get a job or am i going to freak out what about the wife and kids i mean these are real problems and they really aren't funny

now you're probably wondering why i think my parents are artists i mean where's the art they don't have time to make art my father painted a landscape from a national geographic photo once but i'm not talking about that if you asked my father if he was an artist he'd say no i'm an unemployed aerospace engineer if you asked my mother if she was an artist she'd say no i'm not very good at making things but my son has a masters degree in art so what kind of art do these people make

well both my parents have theories about the way things are needless to say they don't have identical theories for instance my father has a male theory my mother has a female theory in fact their individual theories their worldviews are made up of more specific smaller scale theories which aren't necessarily in agreement that is to say there are a number of contradictions within their respective theories but that's true of most people and before i start talking about contradictions i'd better explain what my parents theories have to do with their art well imagine my father has a theory about tape recorders since he's an engineer he respects instruments engineers do not employ instruments in a frivolous manner engineers are serious i mean one doesn't waste time and energy because of deadlines and all so let's assume that the engineer theory of the tape recorder is that one reserves it for the recording of profound utterances to borrow a phrase now admittedly things aren't that cut and dried because i kept asking for profound utterances i mean i was being very tricky i kept asking loaded questions about vietnam and blue collar workers and why do you think this is happening because i wanted to chase my father's ideology out into the open so he's being pressured to speculate he's being pressured into attempts at profundity besides he doesn't really trust me i mean why is my son asking all these questions but the fact is that when i interview my father it sounds like a time magazine editorial or better yet a fortune magazine editorial he keeps using phrases like serious economic retrenchment i mean i get the feeling that the aerospace industry is a network of maginot lines now why does my father sound like fortune magazine eighty percent of the people who read fortune magazine earn over fifty thousand a year my father never earned fifty thousand a year my father never owned any stock here he is living on unemployment and he sounds like the lockheed chairman of the board i mean he thinks all this is a dysfunction of a perfectly equitable system

now i had a neighbor across the street who drove a forklift in a lumber yard he got laid off he didn't need a high school education to know who was getting screwed i mean the guy wasn't any kind of radical but he sure wasn't saying things like what's good for the lumber industry is what's good for america so why in hell is my father making management art why is he making unsolicited speeches for aerospace free enterprise of course my father's position is not atypical for people of his profession a lot of white collar workers a lot of aerospace engineers seem to believe in a coincidence of their interests and management interests it made sense to identify with management when they needed you it made sense when the economy was booming it made sense when we had in the trade jargon a sellers market that was when we had a growing commitment in vietnam and a juicy commitment to all kinds of space hijinks that was when management could treat white collar technicians like something they weren't veiling their expendability with all kinds of elitist soft soap fostering all kinds of individualism i mean here they are ten million guys in white shirts and ties with pickett slide rules thinking they're individuals believing like mystics in the uniqueness of their talent now understand that i'm not saying that they aren't problem solvers i'm not saying that they couldn't solve any number of remarkable problems it's just that the way things are set up there are only a limited

number of outlets for an engineer's ability and engineers aren't trained to think about alternative ways of setting things up and the reason engineers aren't trained to think about alternatives is that the people who pay them like things the way they are i mean it's a perfectly equitable system subject to the minor dysfunctions common to any system

somebody said that every ruling class has an image of itself for itself and an image of itself for other classes and likewise every ruling class has an image of other classes for itself and an image of other classes for the other classes now that may sound confusing but it's really quite important because now we're talking about representations and the contradictions between them now we're talking about image production well white collar representation number one my father's representation number one just happens to be management representation number one that is he believes he is what he's told he is with all kinds of exceptions and allowances for personal differences he believes he's an individual he believes he's got a unique individual talent he believes he's infinitely adaptable and all he has to do is sell himself to somebody who recognizes his essential uniqueness this puts him in competition with a lot of other uniquely talented salesmen now all these uniquely talented salesmen see themselves as something qualitatively different from those faceless blue collar schlepps who come and go with every fluctuation of the corporate profit margin which brings us to representation number two which is management's image of my father for management's own consumption

i was able to photograph that image it's my father's resume it's his life history his talent his abilities condensed on an eight and a half by eleven typewritten page because when push comes to shove that's the form my father has to assume that's how he has to represent himself if he's going to get a job we might call that resume the most minimal form of white collar art we might call it the most minimal form of capitalist art we might call it a map of my father's potential value as a commodity whatever it is it's the only form that pays it's the only form that's convertible into ground beef and shoes and braces for the kids now obviously there's a contradiction between these two representations the first representation is glorious and hopeful and the second is downright frightening because if management doesn't need you you're out and when the contradiction becomes too antagonistic when the discrepancy becomes obvious that's when people start flipping out of course it's all very complex because there are so many levels of identification but it seems clear to me that my father has to keep from thinking about the contradictory nature of those two representations he's got to surround himself with forms that are safe forms that are opaque forms that protect and maintain mental health

so maybe now's a good time to talk about architecture my father has a theory of architecture i should digress for a minute to explain the origins and circumstances of that theory my parents lived for thirteen years in an apartment in a white working class neighborhood the apartment was built in the late forties to house shipyard workers now needless to say these were somewhat atypical accommodations i mean most aerospace engineers live in suburban homes with two car garages and garbage disposals so here we are living with all these blue collar neighbors and welfare neighbors people from the midwest cops pipefitters old people army sergeants divorcees with kids now my father didn't like some of these people he used to talk about white trash and swamp angels and animals i mean he thought a lot of our neighbors were really low he and my mother were probably the only people for several blocks with college degrees but i used to play with the neighborhood kids i never saw them in school because working class kids get

channeled into idiot classes and middle class kid are channeled into the college prep classes all due to a marvelous california educational invention called the tracking system so the neighbor kids ended up getting shot down over the dmz and getting sent up for barbituate possession and getting married and going to junior college and getting divorced and driving delivery trucks while my brother and i went to the university like all good college educated people my parents wanted us to follow in their footsteps they wanted us to be provided with the keys to success so what does this have to do with my father's theory of architecture well in the first place here he is confronted with someone else's theory of architecture that is to say he is confronted with the theory that the most efficient containers for working people are boxes a theory that probably had its origins in the bauhaus but who cares it looks like shit

but as far as my father is concerned there is a certain attractive well disciplined symmetry in a box i mean the place was crowded and my father is an engineer and every engineer knows that the most efficient arrangements are symmetrical so in functional terms the bauhaus box wasn't so bad and i guess in functional terms the plastic seat covers weren't so bad except in the summer but i'm going to talk about another level of architectural function i'm going to talk about interior decoration because the interior decoration was designed to get me into college now i should note that the interior decoration was almost exclusively my father's domain i mean the number of decorating decisions reserved for my mother was small my mother had little opportunity in the visual arts so my father built a bookcase and painted it white then he subscribed to a book purchasing plan to fill the bookcase every two weeks we received an expensive looking volume of great literature

now i don't understand how he chose the books i guess my mother helped she was a literature major in college but it was really a crazy selection there was *quo vadis* next to *the rise and fall of the roman empire* and there was kipling next to stendhal and balzac next to *poor richard's almanac* i know he chose *quo vadis* because the author was polish anyway he used to pay me a dollar for every book i read i mean what's going on what kind of theatre is this the damn books never got opened much but there they were totems of high culture constant gilt embossed reminders of our future as college educated citizens my father built a middle class submarine because he was sailing in a blue collar ocean and he didn't want the sharks to eat his kids

i kept getting that feeling when i went back there with my camera the apartment was a submarine it was underwater it was a cave with conical lamps in every corner we were stuck in the middle of the maginot line we had an airforce to protect us a dozen plastic fighter planes he had even encouraged us to build the models i mean being an aerospace engineer he had a certain affection for airplanes he had always wanted to be a pilot when he was a kid but plastic airplanes were always more encouraged than plastic dragsters the models were totems in some kind of mad hierarchy that rated engineers higher than mechanics

and so everything had its place everything had its order i mean it was his only defense los angeles was madness it was anarchy it was cancer he really believed that and he had to make a stand somewhere and so when he would direct his children to brush the living room rug and straighten the lamps it was like armies of ghetto kids being deployed to clean up watts it was like marching through east la replacing the barrio with an architect's vision of high security suburban malls it was a holding action he was caught in the middle

my father's image of crisis is ahistorical he struggles in the present he doesn't speculate he doesn't compare past and present condition if he were to compare past and present condition if he were to ask himself how upwardly mobile he's been he'd have to admit a setback of sorts i mean after two and a half years of unemployment he managed to land the same job he held sixteen years ago doing process chemistry for the air force

now my mother views the world very differently at least when she talks to a tape recorder she doesn't make speeches she delivers anecdotes she incises fragments of past history to provide context for some present moment i wonder why she's able to think more historically than my father i wonder if her existence at one remove from the management-produced image of the white collar technician her support role her unpaid labor that provides management with well fed well cared for labor forty hours a week her rearing of future white collar technicians has somehow left her history intact has somehow left her unstupified by competition and individualism but then again she's a pious catholic

maybe you're wondering who my parents voted for well my mother voted for mcgovern and i don't know about my father anyway my father and i were driving down the freeway and he said that character nixon owns three mansions and people are pounding the streets looking for work that's the most progressive thing i ever heard him say i could never get him to say that for the tape recorder

so i was able to get some things other things other stances other moments i was unable to record sometimes my own lack of formation my own lack of understanding made me record material in a manner i would have rejected several months later so to some degree i am filling in for earlier omissions but to a larger extent i am writing because of the limited representational range of the camera one cannot photograph ideology but one can make a photograph step back and say look in that photograph there is ideology between those two photographs there is ideology there is such and such and such relates to such

so i have written down some things so you will understand what i am talking about so you won't think i'm documenting things for the love of documenting things obviously i am not national geographic looking at native customs or alligators i'm not trying to discover my self i am not trying to present you with a record of my anguished investigations this material is interesting only insofar as it is *social* material i do not think that i can provide you with an object with no relation other than an art relation to your world because i cannot provide you with *an* experience because you will relate to this differently depending on who you are if you are the president of lockheed you will relate to this in a different manner from the manner of an engineer if you are an important professor you will relate to this in a different manner from the manner of a student if you are a pizza cook you will relate in a different manner from the manner of a sociologist if you are a man you will relate in a different manner from the manner of a woman and so on

Meditations on a Triptych

1973



One

A man and a woman are standing. They are posed in a deliberate way for the making of a photograph. The shadow of a head falls on the scene, obscuring the tip of the man's right shoe. This negative trace points back to the photographer, who stands, as usual, outside the frame. The photographer stares down at a reversed reflection of the scene, and in trying not to shake the camera, fails to notice the intruding shadow. In presenting themselves as a couple, the man and the woman share their space with the mark of an unseen and unskilled accomplice. This is unfortunate. The man appears to be standing on the photographer's head. Because of this flaw, this photograph is valued less than others taken on the same day. The picture remains in the processing envelope.

Years later, the photograph reappears in an almost archeological light. What meanings were once constructed here? What ideas and desires directed this project? Who spoke, who listened, who spoke with a voice not their own? I want to give what was once familiar an exemplary strangeness.

Since this is a still photograph, the man and the woman are still standing. They look to be in their mid-forties. The man could be older. We assume they're married. Is this a photograph of a man and his wife? Or is it a photograph of a woman and her husband? At this angle the man appears much larger than the woman. Of course this impression is only the result of his being closer to the camera, which faces the couple from an oblique angle. The camera has a wide angle lens as well, allowing relatives and loved ones to occupy the same frame as monuments and scenic vistas. Perspective is exaggerated. The man tends, slightly, to belong to the foreground. The woman begins to belong to the background. This might be merely an unmotivated optical effect. Or it could be an overdetermined effect of several causes. Perhaps this lack of symmetry was intended. Perhaps it crept into the frame, unthought of. Perhaps social habit drives us to find it in the scene. Women are often in attendance. They attend to male companions within the picture. They attend to unseen male viewers. Thus we might be more inclined to say "She is standing at his side" than to say "He is standing at her side." There is nothing natural or innocent about this conclusion.

The man has directed the photographer to a point-of-view, mentioning forty-five degree angles and the avoidance of excessive shade. He has told the woman and the photographer of his desires. He has asked the woman to strike a pose. He has adjusted the angle of her stance. Her mantilla has been adjusted to reveal her face. He has drawn himself up, waiting. Instructions have been given. He has failed to notice the juxtaposition of the photographer's shadow and his shoe.

The man's eyes are hidden under the shadow of his visor, but we can imagine him squinting despite the shade. His cheek muscles appear tense, as though supporting a tightness of the brow and lids. One side of his mouth curls upward in a half smile which reads as a mild grimace under the shaded eyes. He stands erect, shoulders back, hands at his sides, head turned toward the photographer.

The woman's hands are hidden. Perhaps they are folded behind her back. She stands nearly at a right angle to the man; her body is more directly oriented toward the camera. She stands with her feet together. She smiles slightly. Her eyes are closed against the light. Although no space is visible between the blue right border of the man and the red left border of the woman, it is likely that their bodies are not touching.

The man and the woman are trying to appear dignified. Perhaps there's more here than in a casual snapshot. The intense sunlight is an obstacle to composure. As the woman turned her head to the right, toward her husband, she discovered a slight advantage. At this angle the sun was partially blocked by the upper branches of a plum tree. The relief afforded

by the movement was only momentary. As her gaze dropped to the level of the camera she was blinded by an uninterrupted glare from the enamel surface of a trash bin. Her eyes closed against the light.

It's 1966 or 1967. Quite probably the man and the woman are facing westward, into the direct light of a sun that is beginning to set.

The man is wearing a military uniform. Those of us who know recognize this as the uniform of the United States Air Force. The uniform is dark blue, the color of the stratosphere. (Somewhere in Washington, in 1946, a team of bureaucrats selected a fabric sample with great care. This was an important public relations decision.) The color of the "frontiers of space." The color of "national defense." The color of a global view of things. The man and the woman could be standing in Dayton, Ohio, or Huntsville, Alabama. Just as easily, they could be standing on Okinawa or Guam. This could be a housing complex near a runway. The numbered garage door behind the couple could be evidence of an orderly military environment.

The man is wearing a large ring with a blue stone on his right hand. It is the sort of ring that commemorates an alma mater. On the man's right shoulder I can make out a blurred insignia, a scrap of metal. This item is bronzed and irregularly shaped. It's not a star, nor is it a pair of parallel bars. The photograph is poorly resolved; it's difficult to tell. The man is an officer. Metal means officer. Enlisted men are identified by patches of cloth. I search a dimly remembered catalogue of ranking devices. Could this be an oak leaf? The man is a major. Perhaps he's a lieutenant colonel. Something is peculiar about this conclusion. Lacking a set of sliver wings, he's no pilot. There's nothing strange in that. But the absence of campaign ribbons, of extra stripes on the cuff of his jacket, suggest that he's only a reserve officer. (Suppose I told you that he's not a professional soldier. Every other Tuesday night he puts on his uniform and drives to a reserve officers' meeting. There's a certain worldly asceticism in this ritual: he receives no salary but accumulates credit toward a pension. His squadron mates are aerospace engineers, chemists, metallurgists, accountants, computer technicians. If a nuclear attack came they would be called into active duty as a "recovery unit." Occasionally they practice with Geiger counters. They study international relations. One day they marched into a darkened auditorium. Suddenly a machine gun opened up, firing tracers across the stage. The burst ended and the lights came up. An actor dressed as a Cuban militiaman crouched behind the gun. Behind him, dressed as a Russian colonel, stood another actor. They both bowed and left the stage. An American colonel, not an actor, appeared and delivered a lecture.)

In this photograph, the man is indulging in a bit of costume drama. He's playing the military dandy and remembering his upwardly mobile march from the enlisted ranks during the war. He exaggerates a sideline, allowing it to expand into an image of self. Personal pride, pride in rank, national pride, patriotism: ultimately he's assumed a rather public pose. There's a recruiting-poster aspect to his stance. And yet, looking at this picture, we have no way of knowing how closely he identifies with the ideas of his more vocal generals. Nor do we know how much engineer's pride derives from association with a sophisticated, technocratic war machine. Hypothetically at least, he's a commander of men, demanding the respect of military subordinates. He stands in a chain of command, a willing military servant of his economic betters. In the same breath, he "speaks for himself" (or so he believes) and speaks for his rulers, who view the whole affair somewhat more cynically than he does.

The woman stands demurely next to her uniformed husband. The woman is wearing a red dress. Her mouth is painted with the same red. A century ago this red might have been reserved for a flamboyant eroticism. The red of the courtesan. The red target of male desire. Now this red enters the space of married life. Department stores broadcast a certain poetry

of desire. Commodities take on mysterious properties. (It's a marketing strategy, an outcome of "motivational research," that governs the orchestration of this red.) Women are encouraged to decorate themselves, to see themselves as decoration. Men are encouraged to see women as animate decor; as objects of a possessive glance.

The man took the woman shopping. He made most of the decisions. They bought two dresses, a red one and a green one. The two dresses were placed side by side on a white bedspread. By chance, Chevreul's law of the simultaneous contrast of colors was demonstrated. The red dress left a green afterimage. The green dress left a red afterimage. The man has a theory of color. So does Kodak. We'll get to that later.

The woman feels somewhat uncomfortable in the red dress. She feels overly visible, on display. Her demure stance contradicts the loud color. She tempers this flamboyance with a black lace mantilla, perhaps finding in it the mark of feminine piety. Latin women wear these things to church. But here, on an Anglo-Saxon woman, the mantilla becomes an exoticism. There's a certain imaginary tourism at work. The man is happy with the hint of Latin mystery, although he distrusts Mexicans. The man likes the woman's bright dress. She's dressed for Mass, her head covered. She is a convert from a more sedate Protestantism. She agrees to the transformation. There are two different human intentions at work; one, male, prevails over and alters the other, female. The woman has read the journals of famous generals' wives, trying to fathom a code of stalwart obedience.

It's Palm Sunday. More film is sold before holidays than at any other time. The woman is dressed for next week's Mass, wearing her new red Easter costume. The man is dressed for military duty. Being a reservist, he is not allowed to wear his uniform to church. There is something incongruous, then, about this pairing of a member of the armed forces and a member of the flock. This is not an everyday moment, a slice-of-life, but an imaginary construction. Costumes have been selected for this brief fiction. Perhaps the woman finds solace, a phantom wholeness, in religion. Perhaps the man finds the same in a dream of military power. They find comfort in each other, and so they stand together.

There's a certain Eastern European Catholic esthetic lurking behind the petit-bourgeois modernity of this photograph, bracketed as it is by choices made in department stores. The picture is a collage, a product of conventions that are remote in time and place of origin. Somewhere behind this photograph, historically remote, lies a medieval image of courtly love, followed by an image of a decorated madonna. First, a knight and his lady in a walled garden. A book of hours. Later, the moral model of the Holy Family is offered to the working masses of Europe. Getting closer to this man's past, we find a familial memory of village life in the Tatra Mountains of southern Poland, a memory of a tradition of peasant courtship and marriage. A fastidious Polish taste for primary colors, for red and white, for elaborately and cleanly decorated Easter eggs. The man has decorated his wife, and through her, an image of his past has been constructed. So much for art history.

The man and the woman are standing in front of a row of white garages. The white paint is scuffed and faded. The asphalt in front of the garages is spotted with oil stains. To the couple's left, on the right side of the picture, is garage number twelve. Is the garage directly behind them number eleven or number thirteen? The building appears to bow inward at the middle, as though it were sagging toward its eventual collapse. All the vertical lines in the photograph are distorted in this fashion. This is merely evidence that an inexpensive camera with a poor lens was used to make the picture.

At this moment the man has a definite sense of purpose, and yet he is unaware of certain peculiar aspects of the image he has composed. He cannot see himself in the viewing screen. He cannot see his own face, nor can he at this moment see the face of his wife. We might guess that the man is unaware of the dilapidated look of the garage doors

behind his back. At the moment the man is unconscious of the significance of peeling paint. What is a field-grade reserve officer doing in front of garages that suggest rundown apartments? Do they live here? Are they visiting poorer relatives?

Martha has a way of calling one's attention to the discrepant elements of an idealized representation. The garages look a bit squalid and the woman has varicosed legs. The woman's legs bear the marks of several pregnancies, of ninety-six hours a week spent working on her feet in the home. Martha imagines a row of couples in Sunday best, each couple staking claim to meager territory in front of their numbered garage door. In other images Martha notices dead grass. She has every reason to believe that something is wrong. She finds the whole display rather pathetic.

(The man and the woman live with five children in an apartment complex originally built for wartime shipyard workers. The man works as a chemical engineer. There's a sort of late-Bauhaus public-housing look to the buildings. Their apartment is crowded but orderly. The man disdains his neighbors, most of whom work with their hands and lack college educations. No one is allowed to park in front of anyone else's garage. The man and the woman pose in front of their garage, which houses their most expensive piece of property.)

Something is being memorialized. An artifact is provided for future commemoration. Is this the realm of an ideal and imaginary existence? Does this practice ensure the future's ability to look back on the past with nostalgia? Is this a small, momentary utopia? The grey vinyl album is opened rarely and then only in the most casual manner. Selected negatives are printed and framed. A few pictures are displayed on coffee tables and dressers.

A commemoration of matrimony. A commemoration of monogamy. A commemoration of a long-lasting marriage. A commemoration of austere affection. A commemoration of rank. A commemoration of a new wardrobe. A commemoration of an Easter dress. A commemoration of the interval before Palm Sunday mass. A commemoration of a moment of leisure. A commemoration of rank and possession.

Two

The man and the woman are now situated in front of a monument of some sort. Now the woman sits at the man's right. She faces the camera directly. He stands, his body turned toward her as it casts a shadow over her left side. His hips, shoulders, and head are turned in different directions, with his gaze directed toward the lens. If he were a painted rather than photographed figure, he would stand as an example of late Renaissance *contrapposto*. He is smiling somewhat and exercising a studied casualness, striking a rather cavalier pose. He's wearing a black silk suit and heavy, shiny, expensive-looking brown wingtip shoes. Now that he's out of uniform, he seems to go for an idiosyncratic dandyism. We discover the receding hairline of a middle-aged man.

The woman sits upright, hands folded in her lap. She sits as demurely as she stood in the last photograph. She's wearing high-heeled shoes and black leather gloves. A large black leather purse, of the type carried by mothers of small children, sits beside her right foot. She is wearing the same red dress as before, but now instead of a mantilla she wears a black toreador hat. The hat has been carefully angled across her brow. The man's most involved preparations for the photograph involved the selection of the correct hat angle. He saw this as an important esthetic decision. The hat is tilted. The right rim is somewhat higher than the left. The shadow of the brim is such that only the woman's chin is illuminated directly. What is the nature of this behind-the-scenes change of hats? Suppose we imagine two poles of a Latin hat iconography. The mantilla occupies an extreme feminine end, while the toreador hat occupies an extreme masculine end. Is this an image of a glamour that encom-

passes all possibilities, whether passive or aggressive? Is this "The Lady in Red?" Does this second hat suggest a female dandy?

This is a color photograph. The woman's dress is bright red. The man's suit is black. Suppose this were paint, rather than photochemical dye. The man's shoes are raw sienna. The sky is a saturated cerulean blue. The trashcan is a saturated cadmium yellow. The base of the monument is beige. The upper portion of the monument is the color of oxidized bronze although it is quite probably cast cement coated with a pale green paint.

The man declares his own color theory. With the first photograph he is aware that a blue uniform and a red dress with stand out dramatically from the white garage door. He's got a certain patriotic effect in mind, but there's more to it than that. A romanticism that has passed from Delacroix to Technicolor allows him to see color as the realm of the passions, as the locus of a kind of acquisitive optical hedonism. Primary colors and saturated hues are found to be more beautiful and more expressive than the muted hues of a mundane and routinized daily existence. One sees color on the weekend. Gauguin headed for the tropics. Van Gogh dreamt of bright, chroma-rich southern climates: all painters will flee to the equator, he told his brother. Unable to afford global tourism, the man opts, like Baudelaire, for the cosmetic, for the artificial paradise. (The man once worked as a house painter in Pennsylvania. During the winter there was no work. To feed his family, the man would cut Christmas trees and spray them with bright enamel paint, using a compressor. He would sell red trees, blue trees, and yellow trees. At the time, this was a novel idea. Now the man orchestrates his wife's and daughters' Easter clothing in the same fashion.) The man takes a certain pleasure in arranging materials that will reveal the full possibilities of the emulsion. The image will be saturated with color: this will be a sign of abundance.

A building occupies the entire rear ground of the photograph. The architect was inclined to round off corners: this seems to be a distinctive mannerism. The monument in the foreground has an octagonal base and a fluted pedestal. This is WPA architecture. This is art deco as it revolutionized the public buildings of America. This is an example of monopoly capital saving its own skin through the agency of the state. This is a high school built in 1938 in a working-class community. The man's head obscures the lower left corner of a bas-relief. The relief is a representation of a male figure operating a wood lathe. We can discern the words "Industrial Arts." The figure in the relief, a blocky social-realist character, appears to be drilling a hole in the posing man's head. The monument has four sides. Only this side was adequately illuminated for the making of a photograph. Even so, the figure of science would have been much more appropriate to the occasion than that of industrial arts. Science represents the man's own career and the career he desires for his male children. Science is a bespectacled male figure gripping an Erlenmeyer flask. Science faces south. Home economics is a female figure operating a sewing machine. Home economics faces north. Athletics is a crouching football lineman. Athletics faces east. Someone has scrawled the word "squat" on the lineman's helmet. Several yards to the south of this pedestal is a marble slab commemorating the death of a football player who died of a heart attack during the homecoming game. (Suppose I told you that there was something prophetic in the accidentally menacing figure of industrial arts. As he poses the man believes he has climbed above his working-class immigrant family background. Two years later, he joins a growing reserve army of unemployed aerospace engineers. Nearly three years after that he returns to work, to a lower-paying, lower-status job. He is ritually humiliated by his superiors. He is told he will not be promoted. For the first time in his life, his work activities are subjected to a time-and-motion study. The upper half of the engineering profession assists in the proletarianization of the lower half.)

Why are this man and this woman posed in front of this absurd memorial to the New

Deal and liberal bourgeois educational ideology, the ideology of upward mobility through learning? What is incongruent about this juxtaposition of private and public commemoration? What are imagined to be the ideal properties of this place?

Three

The woman is standing with two small girls. The man has divided the family into groups. Other photographs are taken of the three older sons. They are asked to hold books as they pose. The only pictures of the complete family are made at a professional portrait studio in Hollywood.

The camera has been tilted at an angle such that the image has the appearance of running downhill to the left. The light is softer now, striking the figures from their left and from behind. In this light the woman's dress is less intensely red. The blue and yellow of the daughter's clothing is likewise muted. All three figures are wearing hats. The older of the two girls wears a hat not dissimilar to her mother's, although it is white instead of black.

The three female figures are connected at the hands. A series of linkages progresses from left to right. The woman's gloved right hand holds a purse, now appearing overly large when compared with the stature of the children. The smallest girl clutches the woman's left glove. This daughter is compelled to raise that hand, her right hand that is, to the level of her shoulder in order to reach the gloved hand. On her left side her hand is extended downward. Her fingers extended over the bare right hand of her older sister. No one of the three appears uncomfortable in this configuration. Of course the light is less harsh now, and the three faces are shaded by their Easter bonnets.

The absent man, the husband and father, is now behind the camera. Without his presence, the image, the stance of the figures, seems less rigid and austere. There is a certain gentle lack of formality in the linked hands of the three females. The isolation of an individual subject is no longer an issue. The artist is no longer standing within the frame. A family is viewed from without by an affectionate and possessive father. The man is pleased by the harmonious contrast of primary colors, the charming series of hats. Is this a testimonial to a man's ability to clothe his family? What is this private display? A fashion show? How about a history lesson in which history vanishes, in which generation follows generation, unaltered and unchanging?

The daughters are dressed like tiny replicas of their mother. Did the absent man ask his wife and daughters to join hands, did they do it on their own? The linked hands take on a temporal aspect. The social role of the reproducer is itself being reproduced.

The three figures face the camera in front of a narrow strip of shabby grass. A larger area of the grass is dead than is alive. A row of lilies grows along the base of a concrete wall. These lilies appear at the same level as the children's heads. That is, the middle of the image is traversed horizontally by a line of white lilies and a line of white bonnets. The lilies and bonnets are signs of the approaching Easter holiday. Lilies are also symbols of purity and the Virgin Mary. Here, aligned with the Easter bonnets of young Catholic girls, the flowers hint at a future motherhood.

The woman's head protrudes above the wall. The wall is probably five or six feet high. The woman's neck, head, and hat are surrounded by a pale blue sky. We wonder how the same sky that was moments before so intensely saturated with color could be so washed out. We can discern a flagpole projecting upward from behind the wall. We could imagine that this pole is anchored in the monument we have already confronted. Comparing the angle of the sunlight in both images we determine that the three females are facing north. The sky behind the wall is seen on a plane parallel to the angle of the late afternoon

sunlight. Such a sky is often less intensely colored than one which catches the full light of the sun. This could be the answer.

Four

The three images form a triptych. Two medium shots bracket a somewhat wider shot. The two outer images angle out from the symmetrical central image. We might be reminded of the half-open doors of an altarpiece. A red dress is repeated three times. There is an abundance of primary colors. A camera is confronted squarely in daylight.

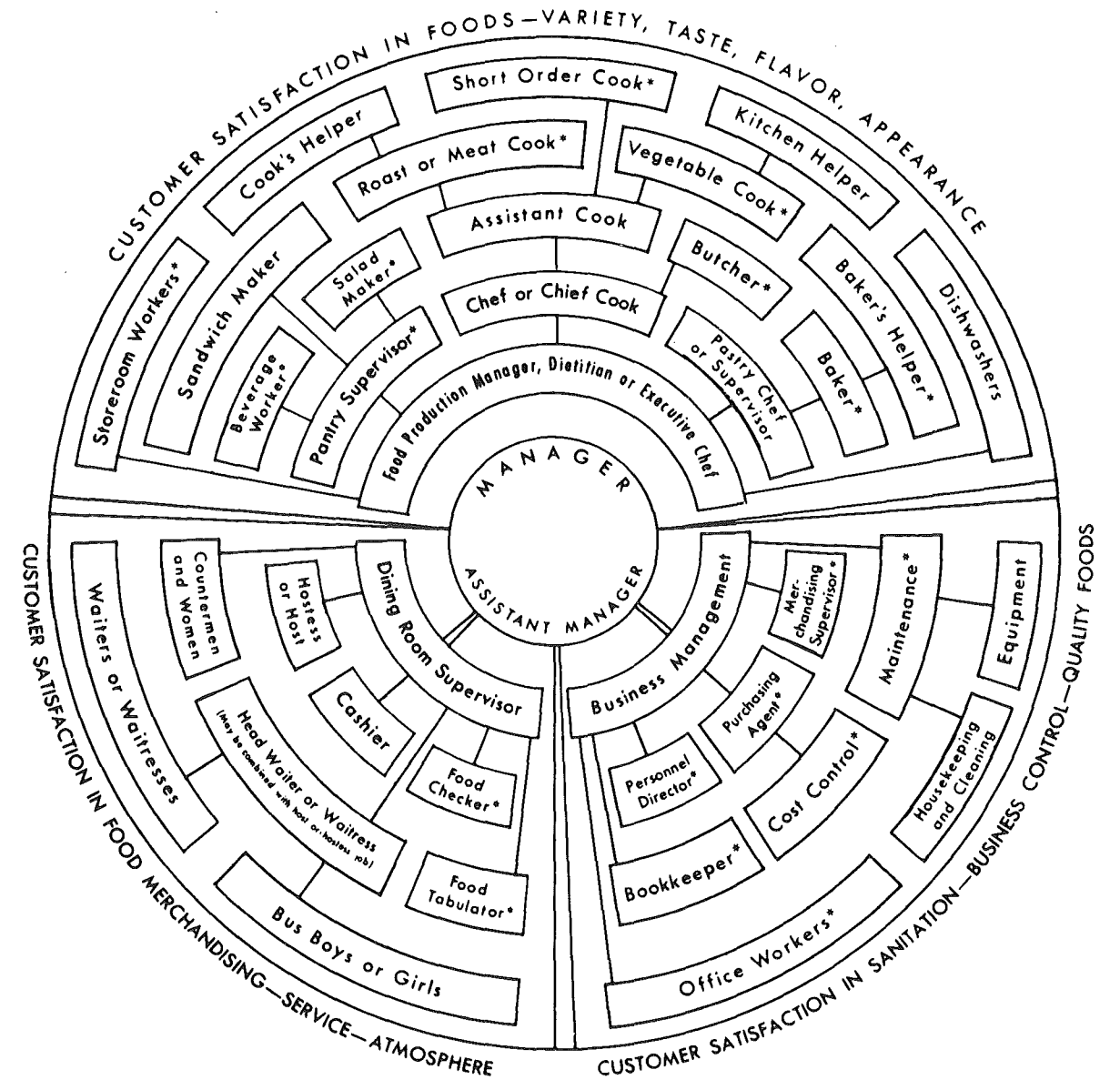
1973
1978

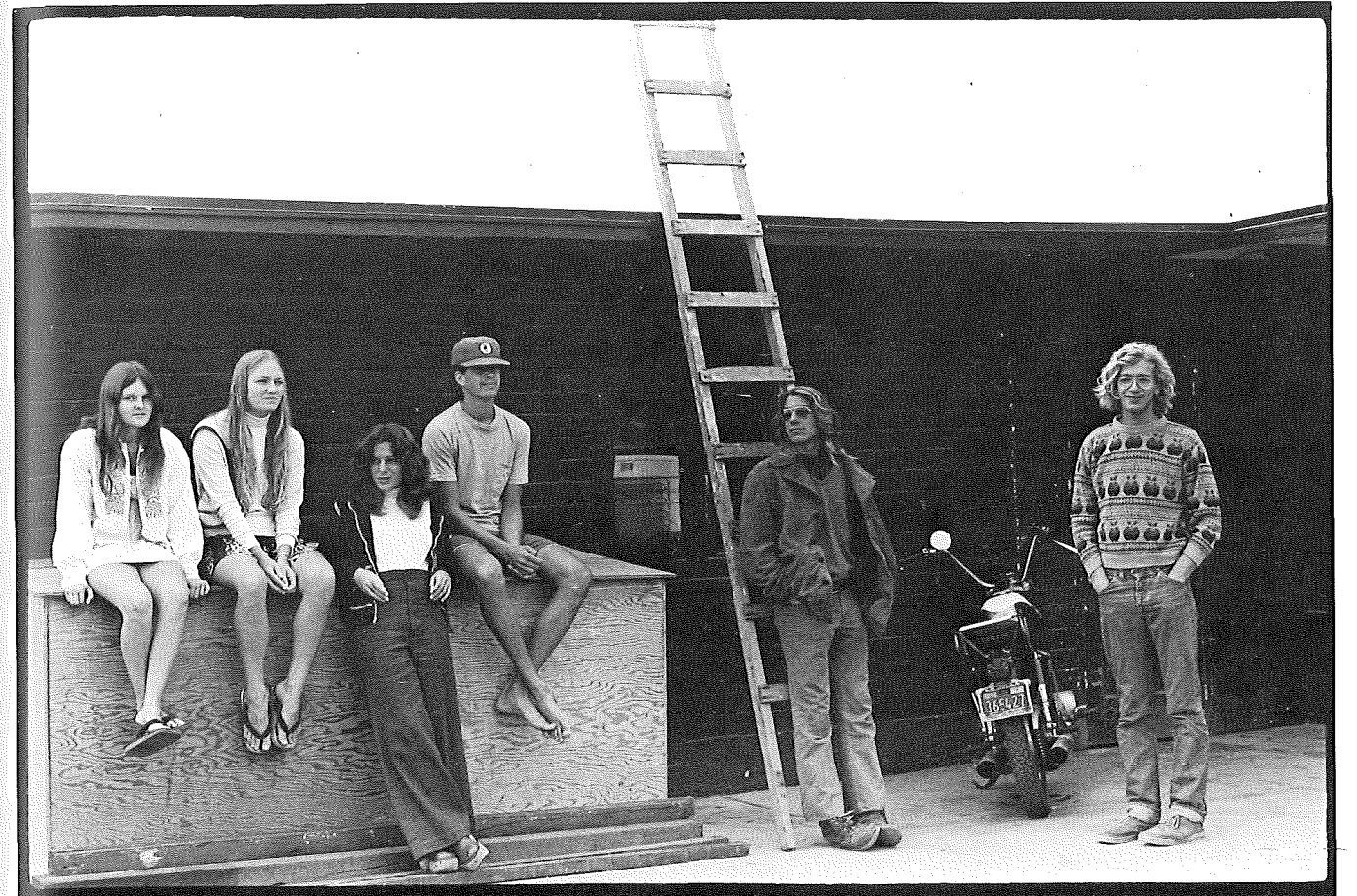
This Ain't China: A Photonovel

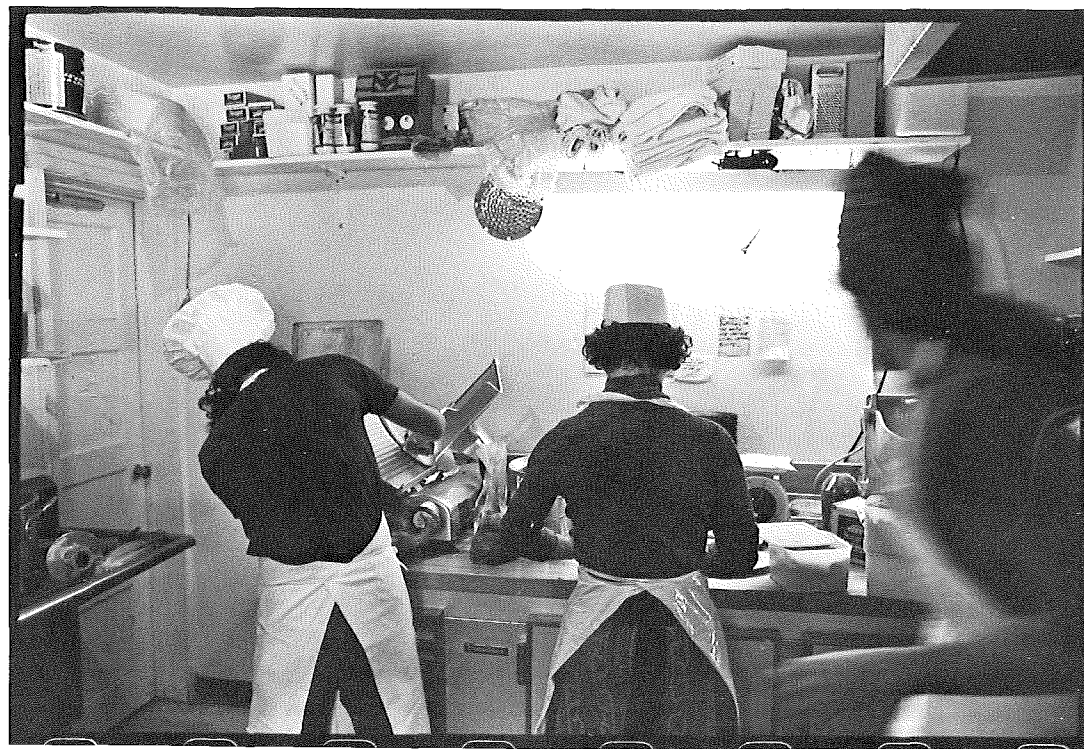
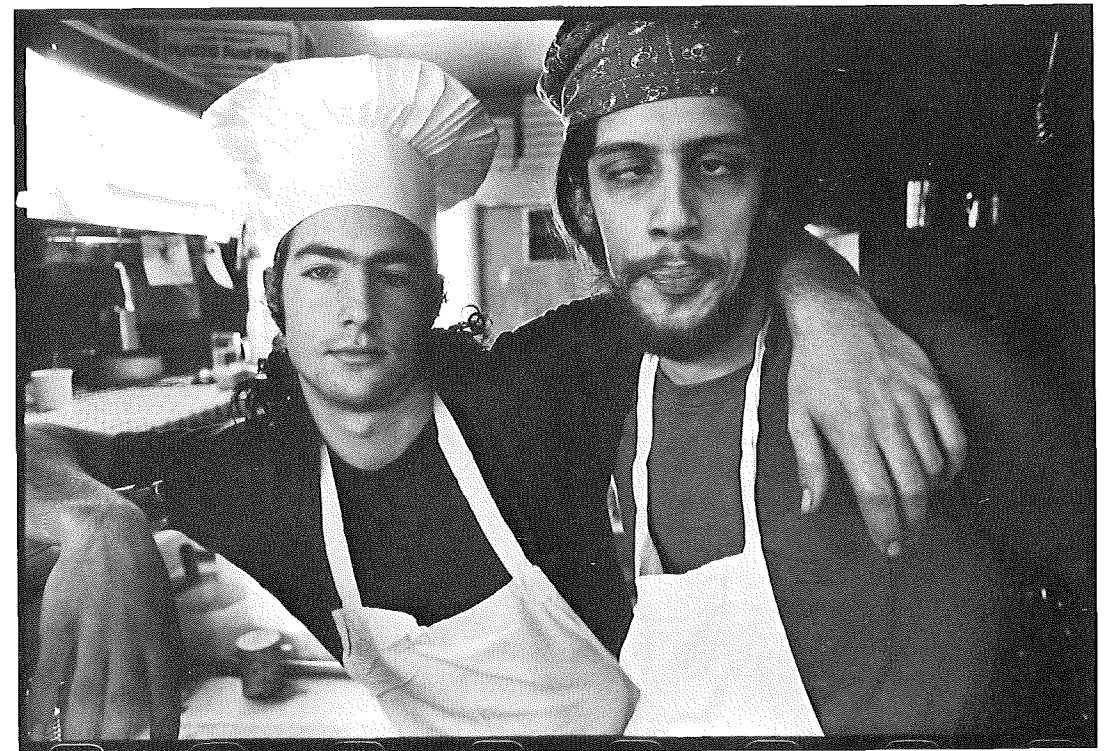
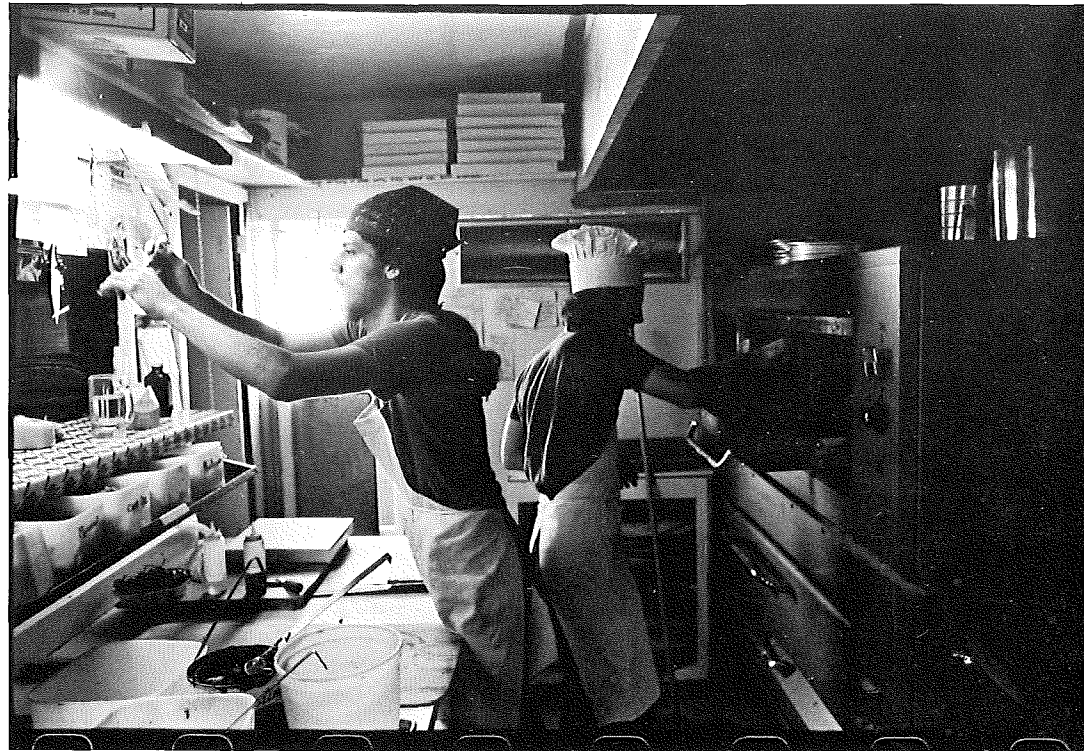
Introductory Note

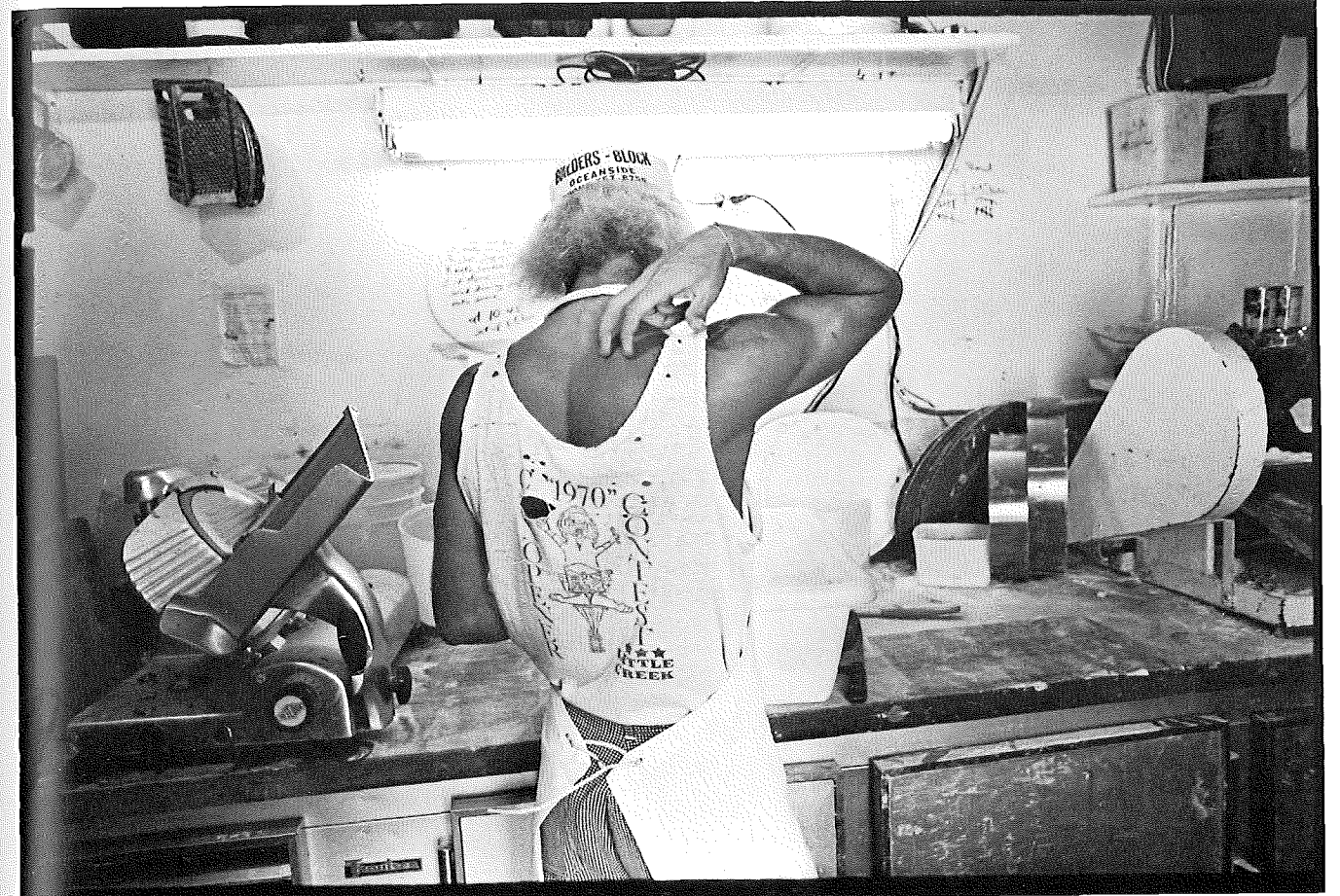
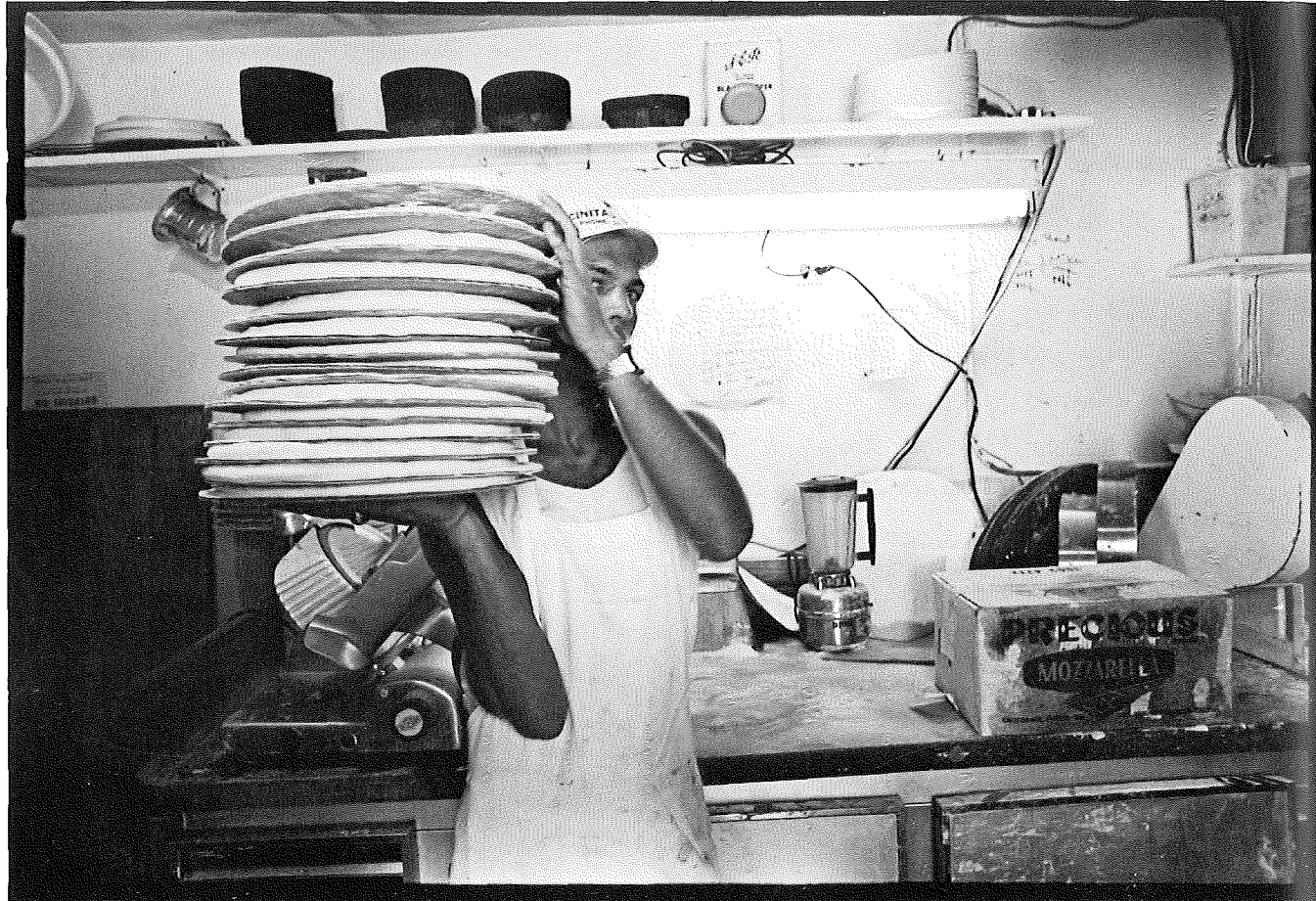
The first version of *This Ain't China* consisted of ninety photographic prints grouped into ten sequences. Each of the final five sequences was accompanied by a book of text. When the work was installed, the books hung on chains from the wall and chairs were provided for readers. Subsequently a photocopy version of the work in single-volume form also was exhibited.

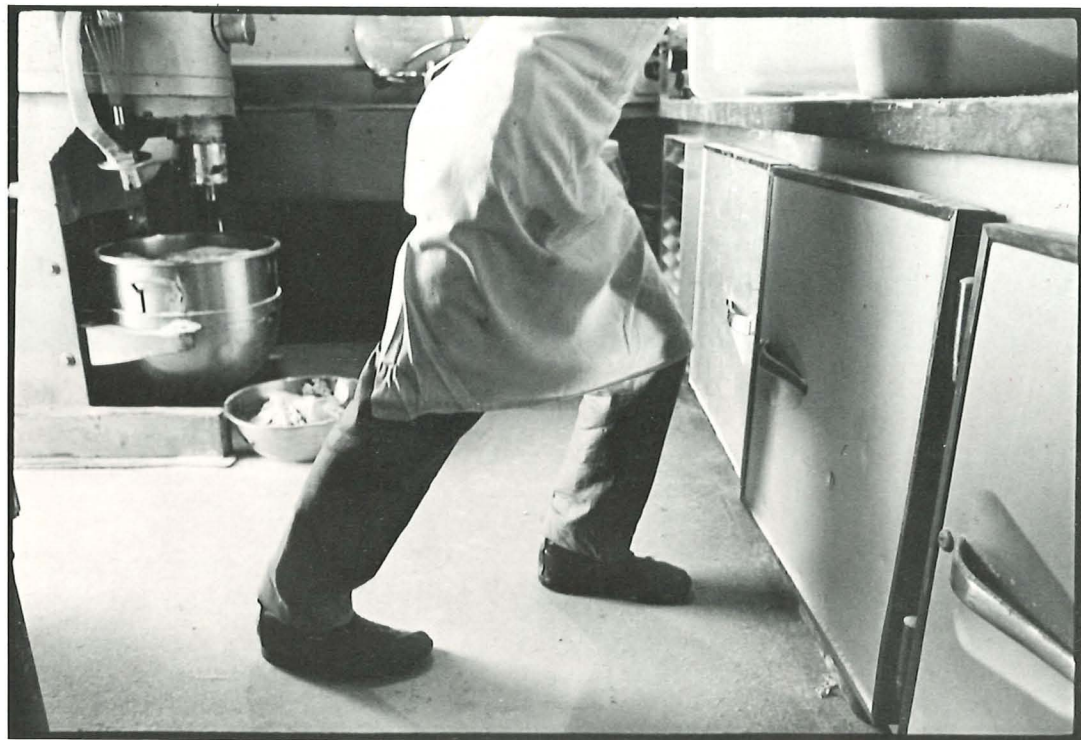
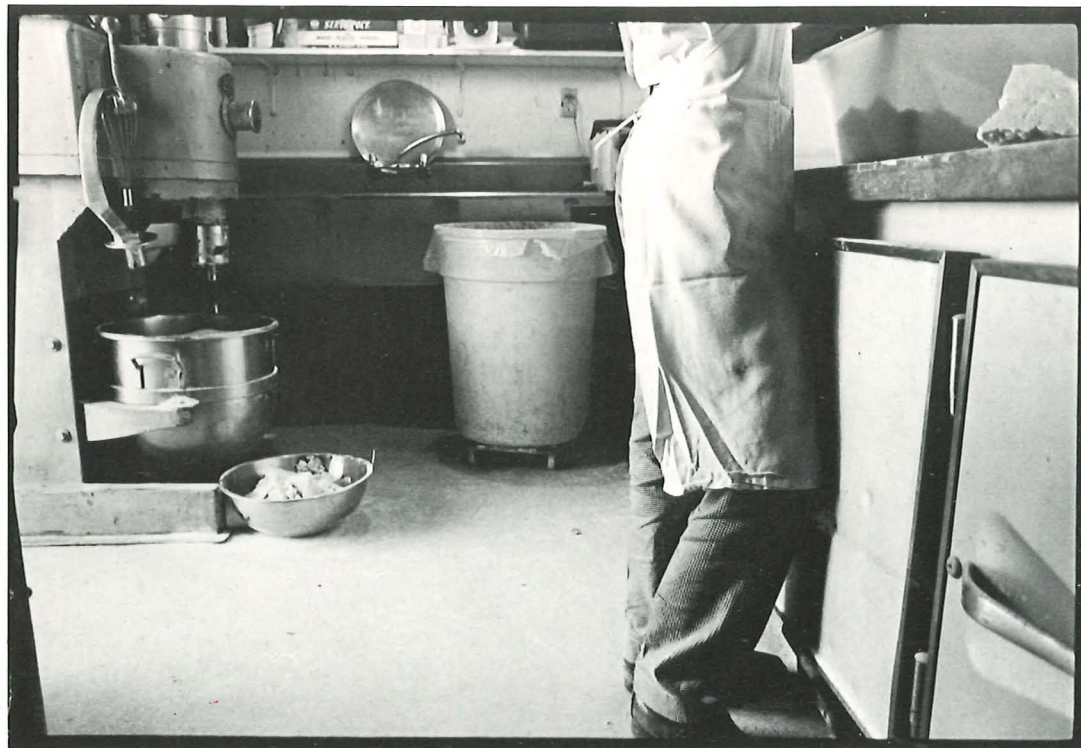
As with *Aerospace Folktales*, the version presented here evolved out of informal presentations using two slide projectors. And again, the general narrative flow of the original has been maintained, although individual sequences have been shortened considerably and the text has been edited to about two-thirds of its initial length. All the photographs on pp. 186-187 were printed originally in color, and were larger than the others.

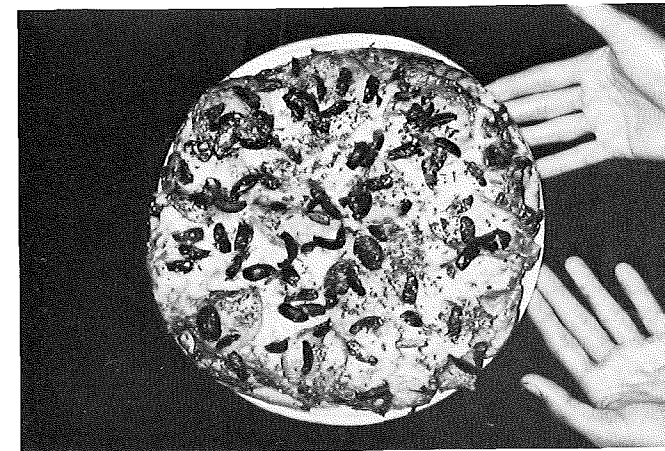
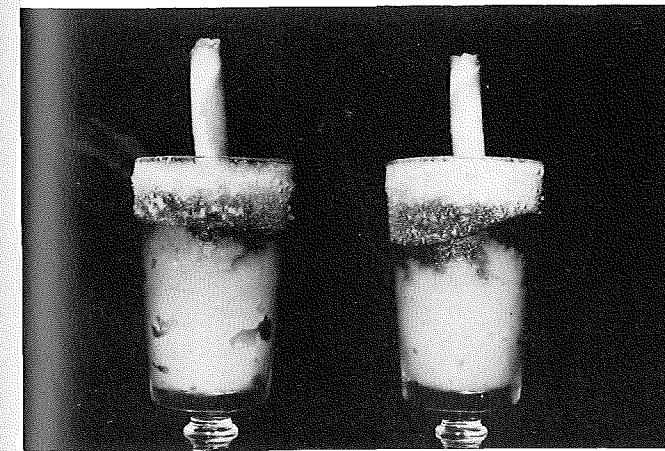
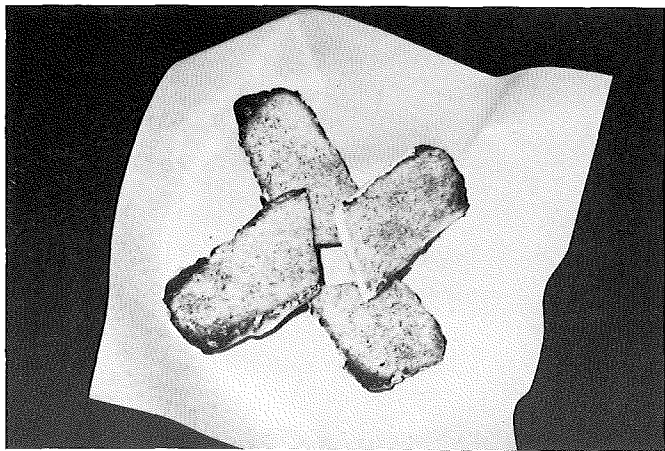
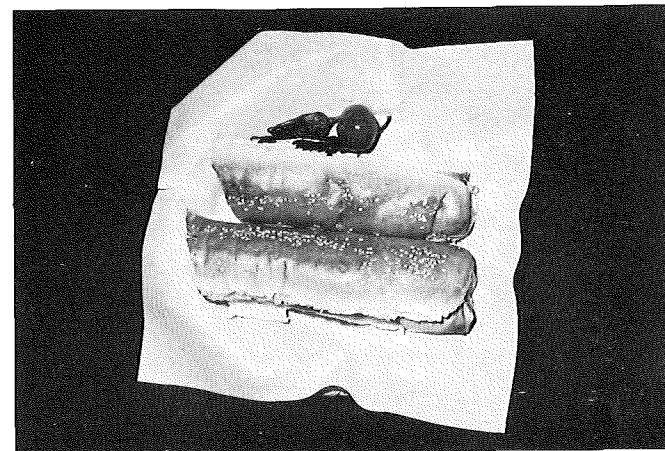
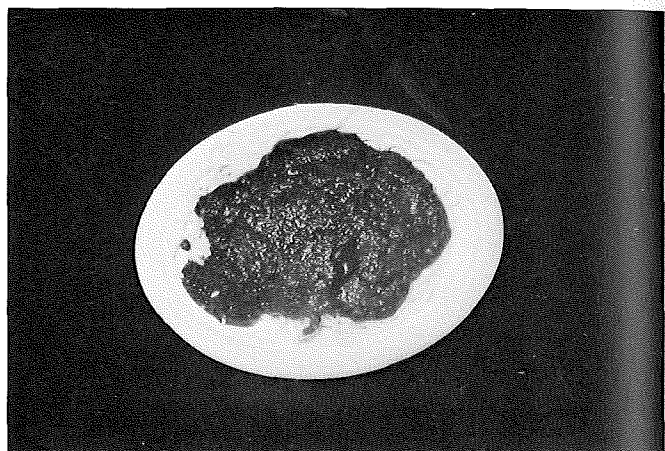
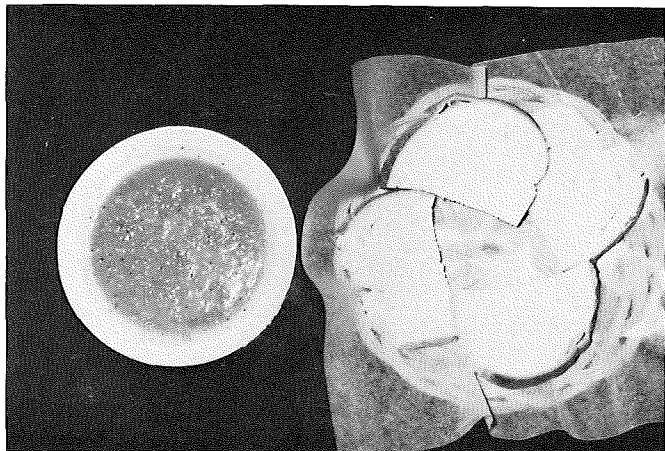
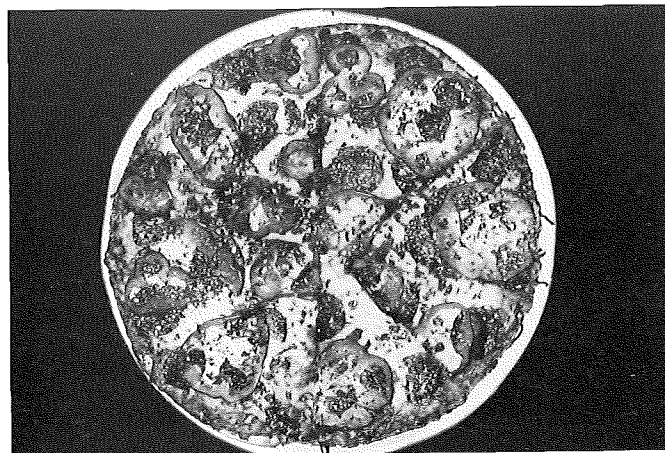
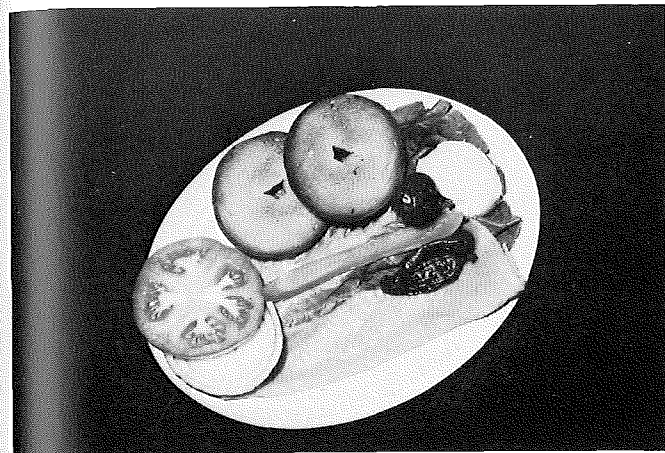
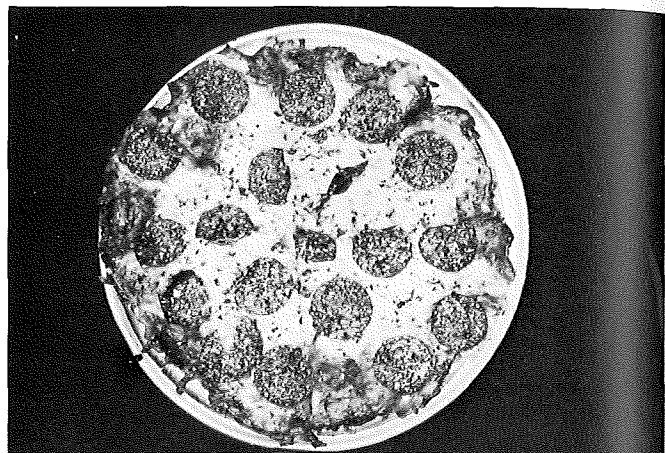
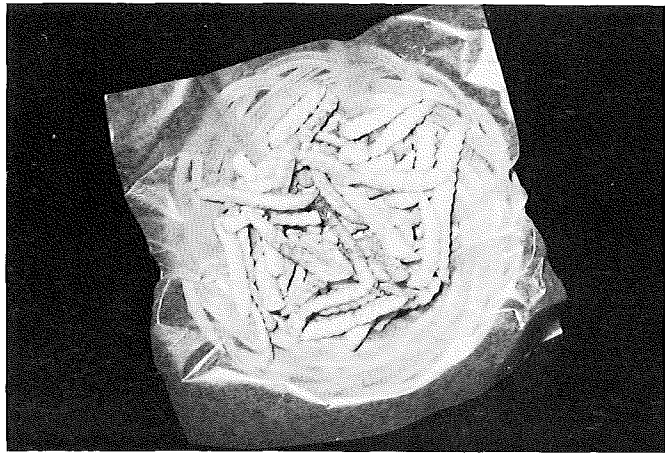












1.

the cook liked to believe that his story pivoted on a parable about the relative merits of fact and fiction in everyday class struggle.

but that's not my car the boss objected nor is that my house. this seems to be a standard employee trick. the troublemakers try to convince the others that the employer lives in luxury at their expense.

the cook confessed yes i lied that's not the boss's car nor is that his house. it's just that the photograph i had of his cadillac didn't make my point. it's not what the boss has but what he wants that strains us in our work. if the drive for profit is a source of our troubles how better to show it than by inventing an image of progress. here we have the present and future boss signified by the objects of an acquisitive lifestyle.

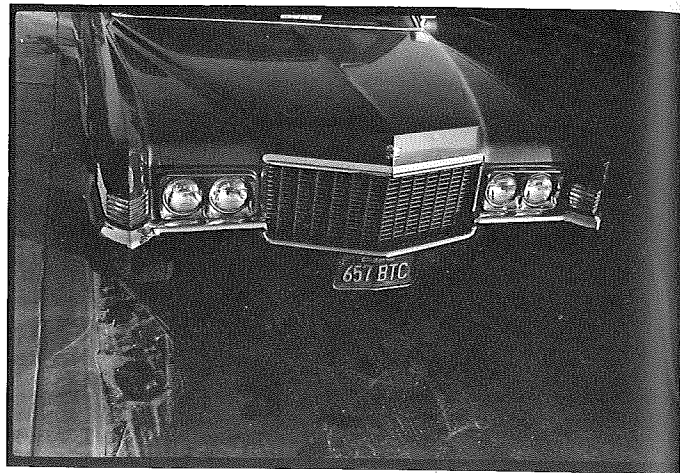
everyone was satisfied that the first photograph constituted the truth and that the second was a clever piece of propaganda. and from that point on all the photos had a staged look. not because of a moral or esthetic commitment to fiction but because it was no longer possible to photograph inside the boss's kitchen nor was it possible to work there.

2.

a psychological novel in which the boss invented himself and was in turn invented.

he lost patience with science with the immateriality of theoretical chemistry. the reclusive life of the graduate student the oppressive atmosphere of the engineering library the seminars empty of women all contributed to his growing sense of discomfort. his dissertation seemed far away.

more and more time was spent fantasizing. he considered taking up gliding. he called several friends and promoted a diving trip to mexico. he became more envious than usual of his father's virtuosity with the violin and was irritable for the duration of the orchestra's visit. the arts seemed to have something over science. of course there were glamorous scientists. he had been introduced to jonas salk at a cocktail party. one of the other guests had likened pure research to the career of picasso. but science and art seemed to mix only under certain conditions. an esthetic sensibility seemed to



require a certain degree of economic security. salk and his ilk could afford to be connoisseurs.

he decided that his academic identity was preventing him from living life as he wished. he began to value his contacts with the wealthy residents of the community surrounding the university. he performed favors for several months at a time would live in and protect the homes of wealthy vacationers. he became known as a reliable caretaker. for two years he paid no rent but lived alone in large houses.

gradually he found that a certain quickness of mind a youthful pragmatism was admired by the owners of the houses he guarded. he began to see himself not as a theoretical chemist but as an engineer with an acute business mind. with a certain amount of calculation he began to represent himself differently to well-off acquaintances. he began to talk about opportunity and investment.

his first enterprise began well but ended poorly. he and a partner designed a concrete boat and began construction in a vacant lot next to a lagoon. labor at least was cheap. that section of the county was full of young people ex-students surfers unemployed carpenters and so on who were willing to work for low wages. he named his company something like "systems research associates" evoking an image of advanced technology.

a loan fell through. he blamed his misfortune on the garbling of a crucial telephone message. communications technology became an obsession. he hired an answering service. he installed a telephone in his car.

his second enterprise sought a harmony between vivaldi and a staple food of the neopolitan working class. "cheese like car-rara marble" was a slogan for his ads on the local classical music station.

he planned to revolutionize the restaurant industry.

she found it difficult to read the boss's features. with his back to the window he was hardly more than a silhouette. she was vaguely aware that his eyes avoided hers. since she was prepared for any one of several varieties of masculine onslaught she found that his manner put her off-balance. and yet any sense she had of his uneasiness was outweighed by her discomfort at being interviewed.

he seemed to be impressed that she had studied acting. he began a routine explanation of her duties but then his speech took on an unusual fervor. after a while she realized that this

restaurateur was a frustrated director.

he told her that *there is a one-to-one analogy between many aspects of the restaurant business and the theatre business. in the theatre you design a set which creates part of the atmosphere and mood. an audience becomes involved in that set they identify and that's how they enjoy the production. in the restaurant there is a set too it's the booths the way the walls are done the way the interior is done the front door the costumes the waitresses wear the whole atmosphere. different restaurants have different moods different sets and it's just as important as the set is to certain types of theatre*

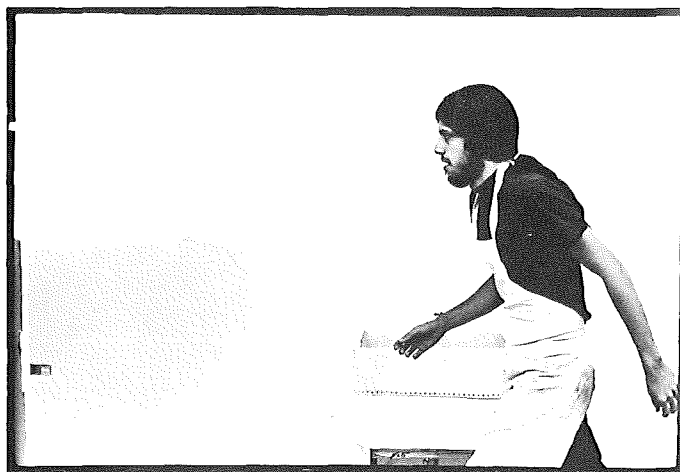
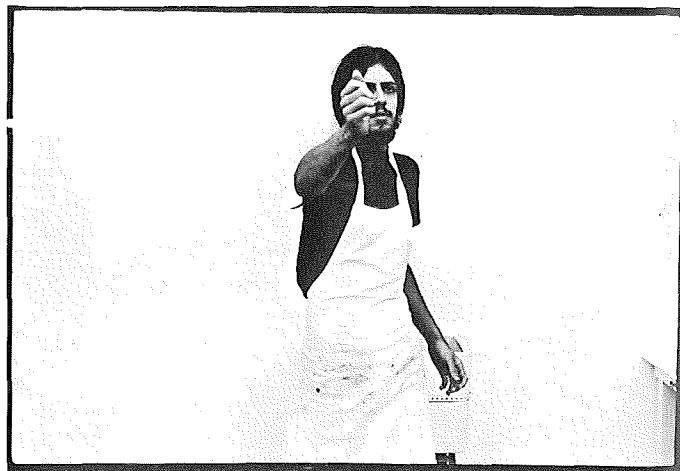
you have a script it's the menu and just like theatre the same script plays every night. yet no two shows go alike because you're playing for a different clientele every night.

you have actors the actors are your waitresses. they are certainly not necessarily delighted to see everybody who walks in or eager to serve them or enjoy the role they're playing. but they are indeed playing a role and they've got lines. of course money is involved which makes for differences between waitresses. one is jealous of another because she's working tuesday afternoon from three to seven while the other is working the more lucrative friday night shift.

and you've got a backstage crew the people in the kitchen. they are making the show click the stagehands the technical director the cook who runs the wheel who is in charge of the kitchen is just like a stage manager. he's got to watch the cues get everybody out on time get all the food out on time. there's the same kind of "show must go on" atmosphere an urgency. if a cook is sick you can't come out and make an announcement "cook's sick! we can't serve dinner tonight!" the show goes on and the show must go on. if somebody gets injured if you run out of something you've got to cover up for it some way the show must go on.

the customer can not be conscious of what is going on in the kitchen. it spoils his meal. as soon as a member of an audience is conscious of what's going on backstage it's taken his mind away from the show. he's had to step out and look. it ruins the show. it would be just as inappropriate for a cook to come out and march down the aisles and talk to people in his apron and hat as it would be for a stage director or a stage manager to walk out on stage and check the lighting.

she decided that his insight lacked any sense of irony. he took his metaphor seriously he lived within it. and despite the appearance in his conversation of a certain philosophical distance from his own enterprise his logic was consistently that of the businessman. and only by appearing impressed by the depth of his dramaturgical analogy could she avoid falling into



premature disfavor.

so this is what brecht meant by culinary opera she thought food and service designed to transport the customer into an imaginary world. the menu with its encyclopedia illustrations of baroque musical instruments the illuminated plastic beer display with its crowd of men in boater hats admiring an antique automobile a geographical and historical collage.

she was beginning to understand the boss's act.

3.

a political novel in which workers were denied the privilege of psychological treatment

some of the workers wondered what a brechtian restaurant would be. one of the cooks had read a story in the *los angeles times* about the destruction of "fine chinese cookery" during the cultural revolution. the revolutionary cooks and waiters of peking had reorganized the restaurants to feed working people cheap and nutritious meals banishing the elevated fare that harked back to the rule of the feudal classes and which threatened to become a cultural bulwark of a new class of technocrats and managers. this cook was challenged by the others. this isn't china they said we don't serve elevated fare we serve pretentious fast food. the cook persisted. hadn't they noticed the way well-off left-liberals behaved when dining in a restaurant? a waitress familiar with the university clientele agreed that there was indeed a difference between the intellectuals' words and actions as though one could be a critic in thought alone. but no one was sure how to apply these insights to the present situation.

given their circumstances even a corrupt labor union was better than nothing.

the union asked for a list of grievances.

management spied on workers.

management suspended a waitress for taking a bite of a sandwich when she was on duty but the restaurant was empty.

management lurked outside a window in the dark for an hour waiting for a cook to make a mistake eventually firing him for using too many mushrooms.

management demanded unpaid overtime.

management accused employees of using company bandages to

treat cuts that were not received on the job.

management refused to buy a proper first aid kit.

management responded to the suggestion that a first aid kit would be a good idea by noticing the dirt beneath the base of a dough-mixing machine.

management demanded forty man-hours of unpaid labor to clean the restaurant after receiving an unsatisfactory health rating the rating having been lowered because of peeling paint a leaky roof and warm refrigerators.

management insulted the intelligence of employees.

management threw food and utensils at cooks.

management invited employees to a company dinner and then responded to refusals by demanding overtime.

management was a master of the double bind.

management fired some workers for trivial infractions of absurd rules and punished others by cutting their wages for weeks at a time.

management cut overall wages several times.

management made a lot of money.

management called a waitress at home at three in the morning to remind her that she hadn't filled the sugar bowls.

management developed a flair for emotional abuse utilizing this talent primarily on waitresses.

management drove several waitresses to tears.

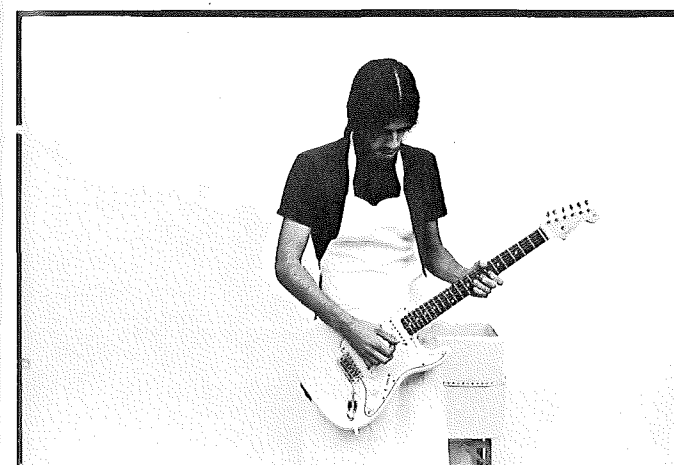
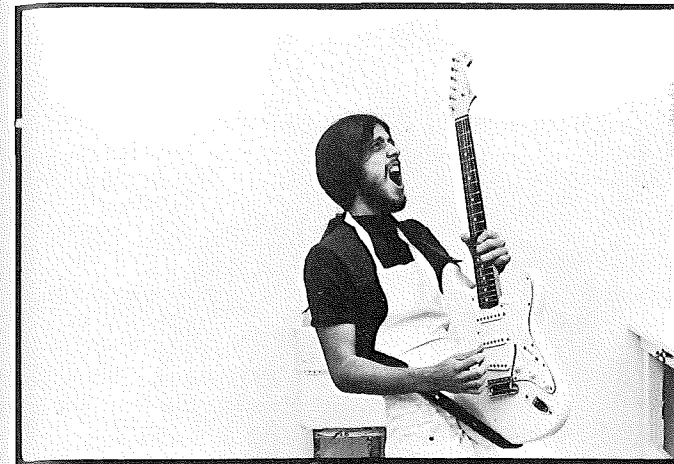
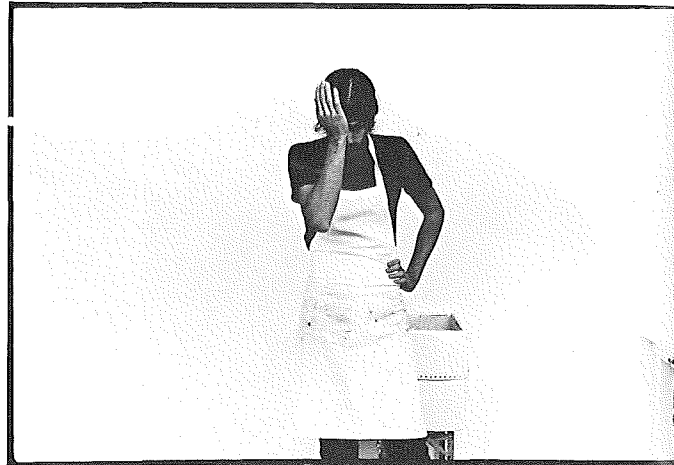
management complained of a lack of intellectualism among workers.

management deliberately misinformed new employees about the union.

4.

a political novel in which workers were allowed the privilege of psychological treatment.

at work the employees often compared their dreams about the restaurant.



the cook dreamt he was sitting in a long low room a room ceilinged with acoustical tile. menials in white pressed and folded bedclothes on large steaming machines. the cook realized that he was attending a briefing. he was surrounded with empty folding chairs. a heavy woman was reassuring the audience. he realized that he was about to see something horrible. her jokes were designed to allay his fears. she was describing a dead woman his mother lying in a glass-windowed coffin. as a child leaned over to peer down at the dead face breath steamed upward fogging the glass. the heavy woman chortled "you see it be not so bad she still be steaming."

then the cook found himself in a line of people walking rapidly through narrow corridors through curtains of green surgical cloth. hulking technicians in white coats blocked his view to the side. arms folded they shouted "don't look don't look." he managed to glimpse a cadaver atop an autopsy table a corpse the color of rust. he passed through another green curtain an illuminated plastic sign displayed the words *danger: radiation* the alcove to his right contained a series of glass vats in which floated horses' heads connected to oscilloscopes with platinum wire. a slab of pastrami as big as a man was suspended on thin wires in an electrical field. measurements were being taken.

the waitress dreamt she was fucking the boss. his body was composed of raw pork sausage.

the dishwasher found himself with the work of two men on a busy night. his partner an elderly filipino had had a heart attack. the sound of dishes colliding with the stainless steel sink became unbearable. the hum of voices in the kitchen took on a vicious quality. for five minutes he stood by his machine unable to work as dishes piled up around him. he was convinced he had somehow accidentally taken lsd. finally a busboy came back to help.

5.

a psychological novel in which the boss invented the workers

the boss considered himself a liberal. but he saw liberalism less as a political position than as a cultured and tolerant way of living. in other words he distinguished between two types of liberals. the first type his type was characterized by a tough but refined pragmatism. the second type was idealistic and hysterical. he had been disturbed by the absence of rational discourse that pervaded the campus atmosphere during the days of the cambodia invasion.

the boss figured that his employees did not understand business.

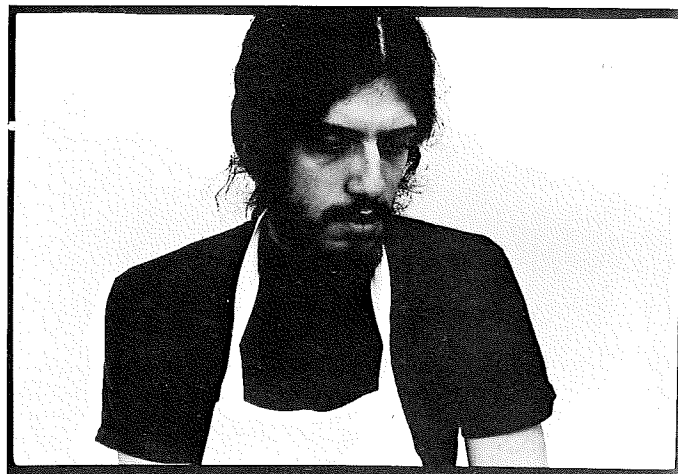
profit was a sore point with them. his car had been made a symbolic issue though it was his only real luxury. he couldn't swallow the argument that this was not a personal attack. he paid the same wages as everyone else in the area. he was not a rich man.

he tried to talk to his employees. did they really want to sit in a union-sponsored medical clinic in waiting rooms full of blue-collar workers? did they understand that his prices were skyrocketing? one of the cooks kept replying "my meat prices are going up too my meat prices are going up too."

the way the boss saw it most of his employees were a bit shiftless. most were willing to work hard but few had any real ambition in life any personal drive or individual goals. of course they were young in their early twenties and it was understandable that they lacked direction. a few of the cooks would rather play rock and roll than work. on the other hand a couple of his employees seemed to have a misguided ideological commitment that could only have been the result of a vietnam-era college education in the liberal arts. these employees were willing to exploit the grievances of the others to foster an atmosphere of discord. he was quite willing to deal with his employees as individuals but not as a mob.

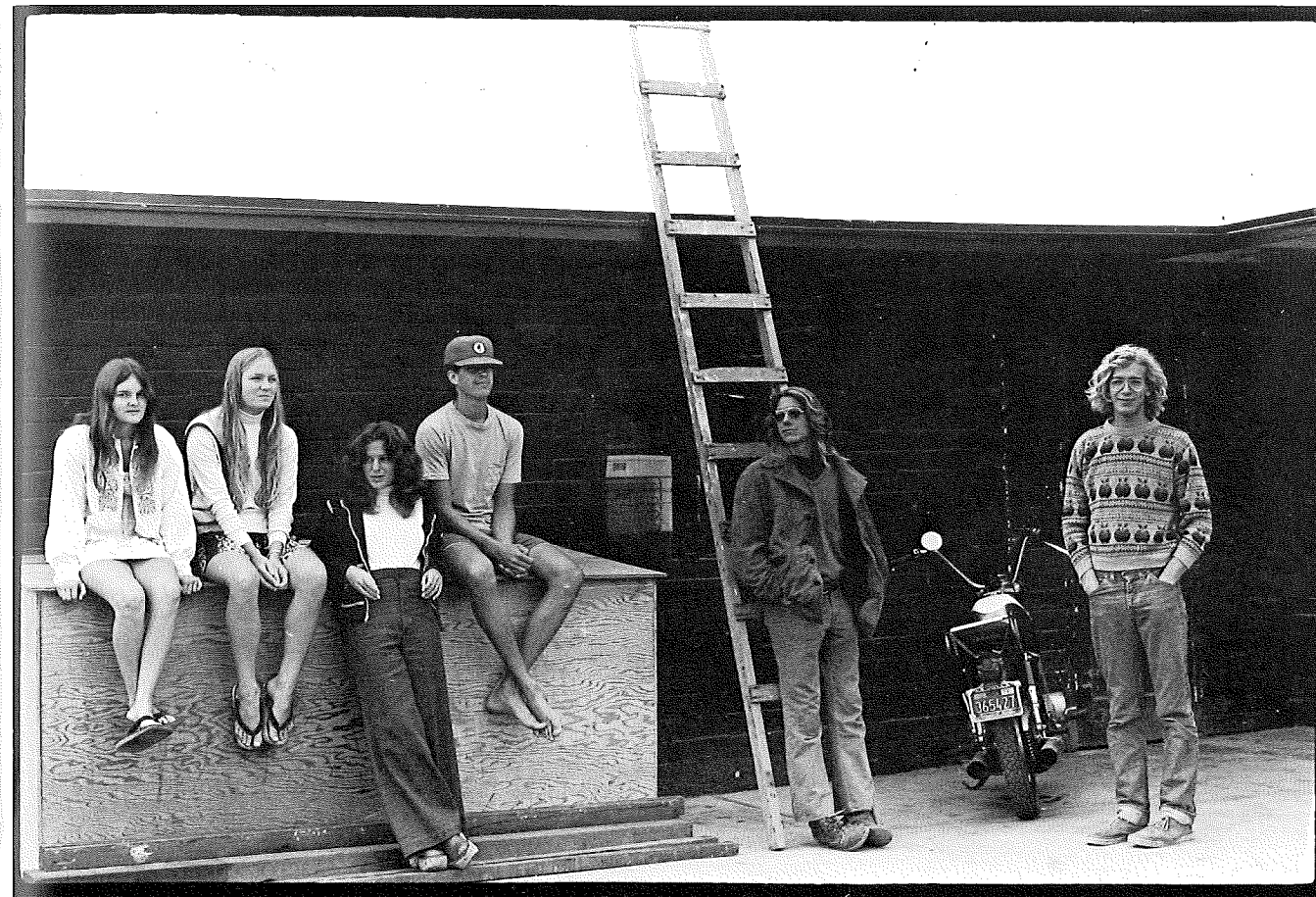
he hired the most expensive union-busting law firm in town.

the boss was confident that his employees would respond to reason.



beware: a workers' defeat has been converted into an artwork.

1974

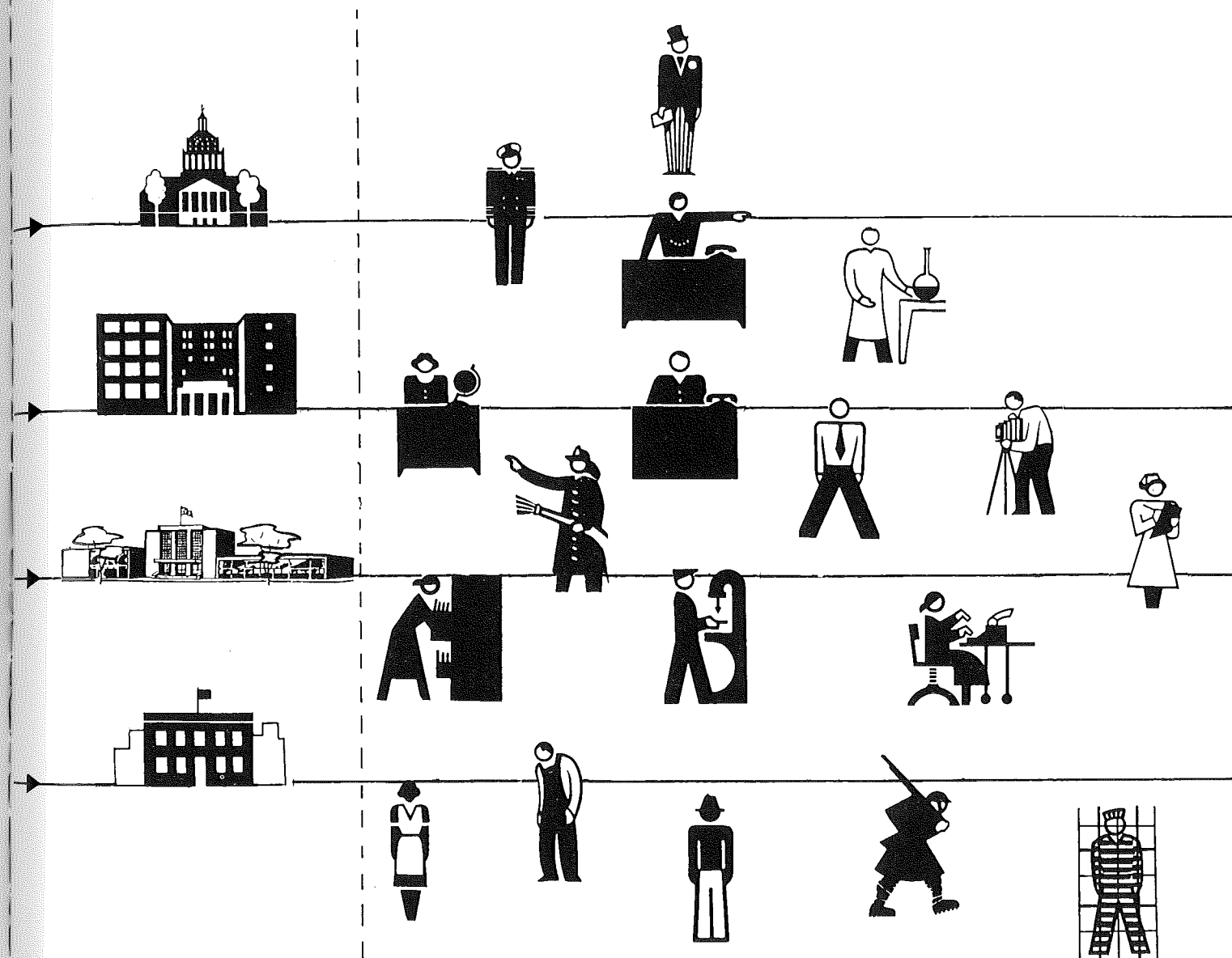


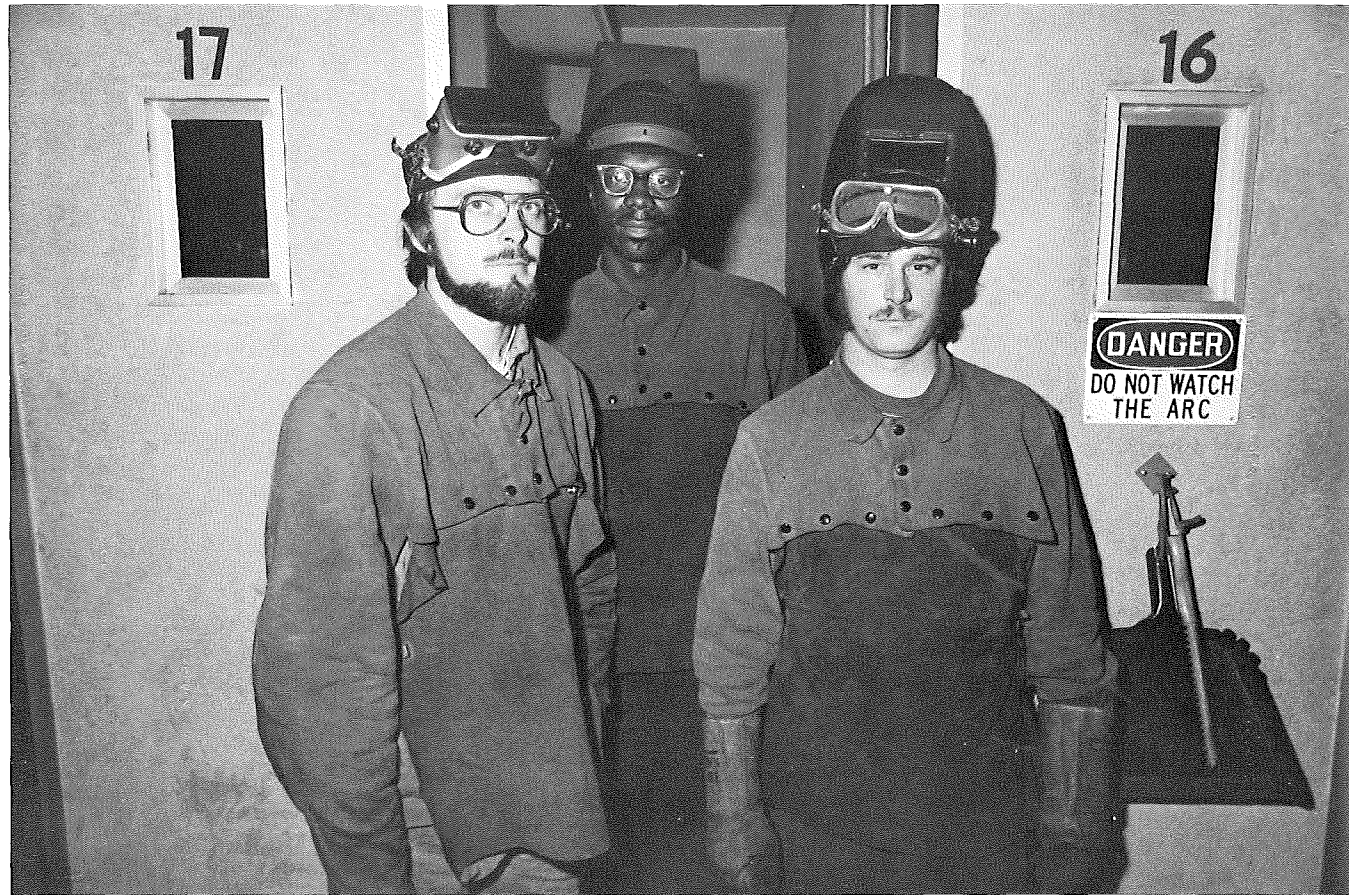
School Is a Factory



Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw materials are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of the twentieth-century civilization, and it is the business of the school to build its pupils to the specifications laid down.

Ellwood Cubberly, **Public School Administration**, 1916.

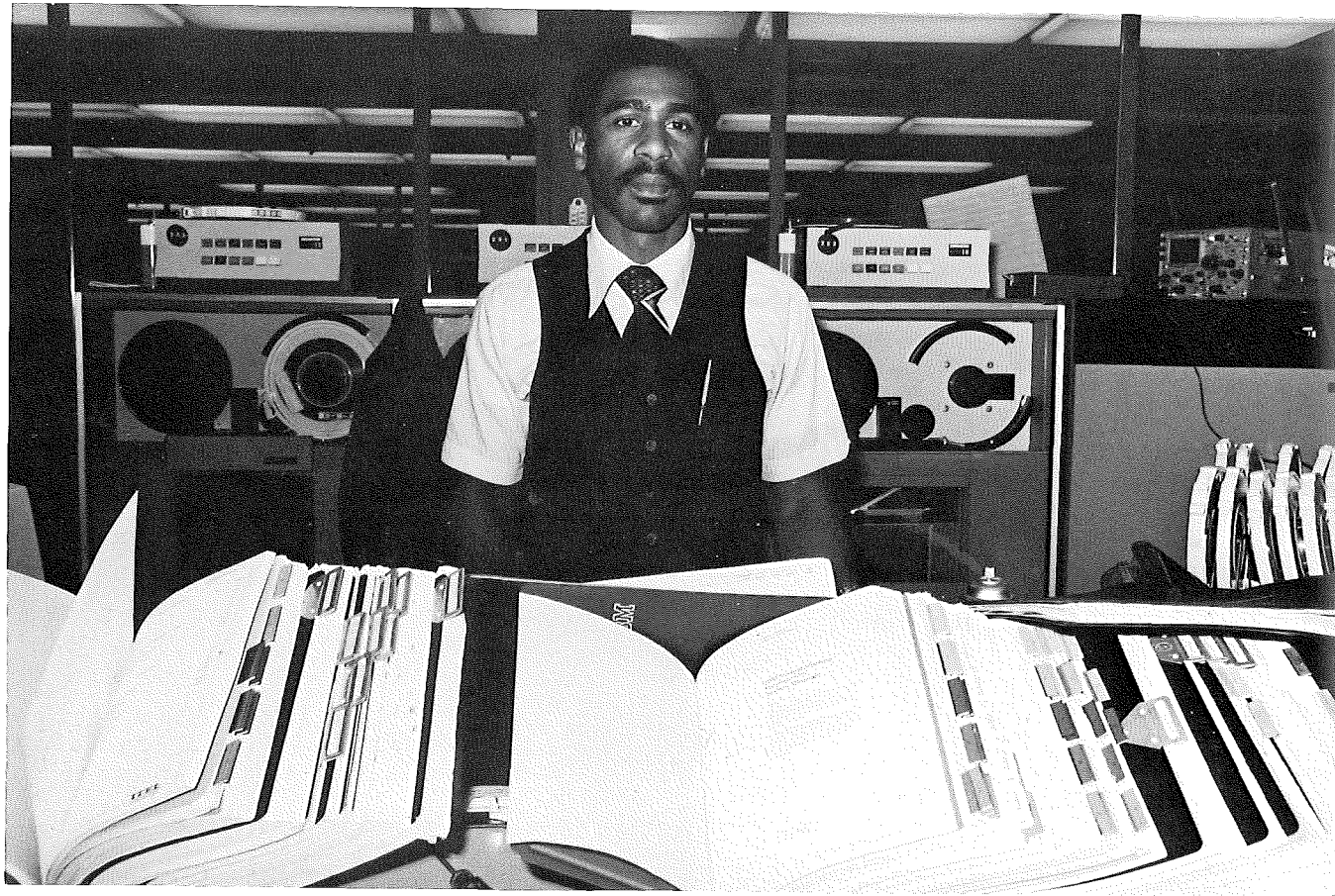




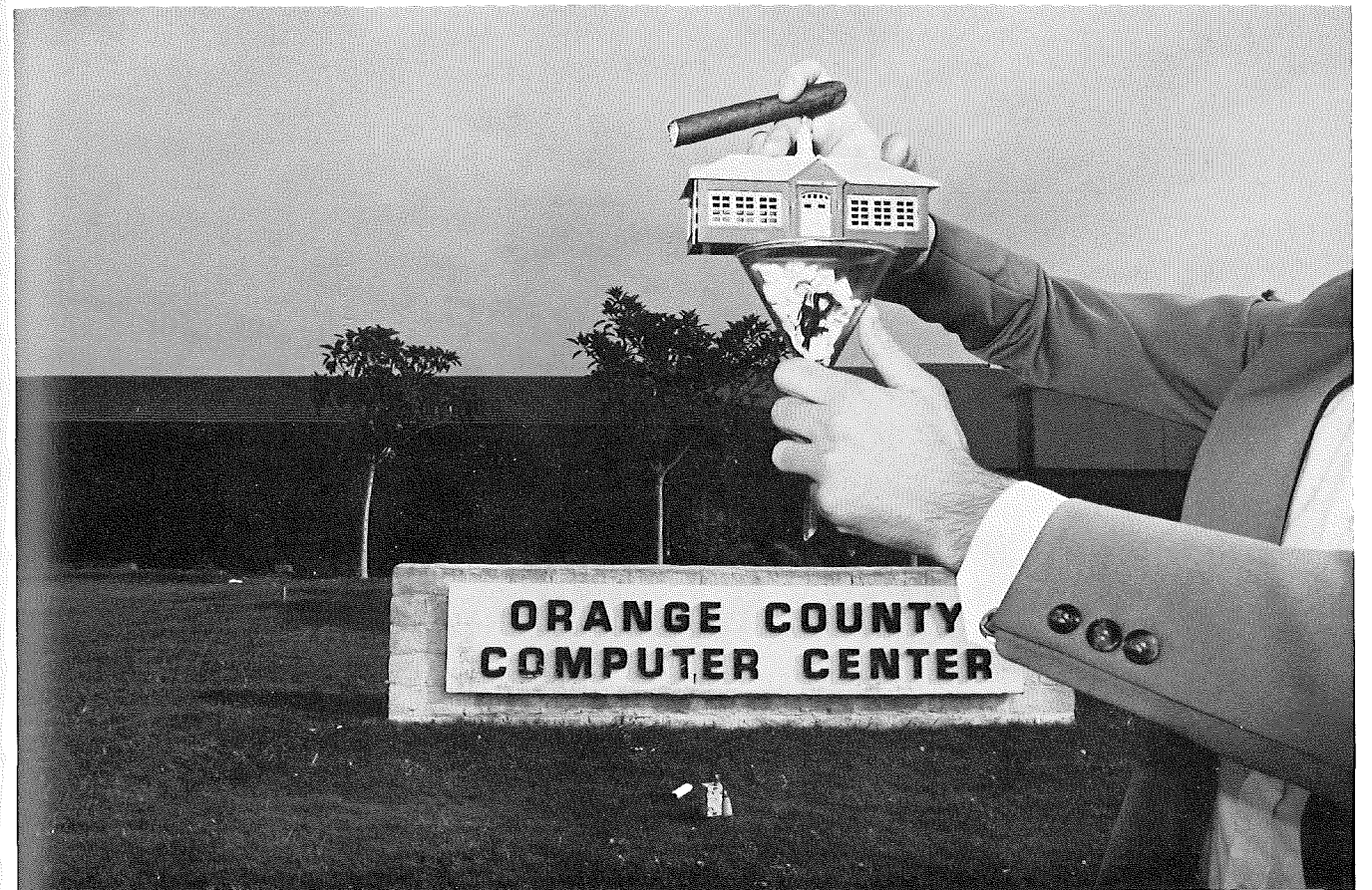
This photograph was taken at a community college in Southern California, as were all the following pictures of school situations. Three welding students pose for a portrait. They hope to graduate into jobs with metal fabrication shops in the area. Their instructors act like bosses, supervising the action from a glassed-in office. This apprenticeship program, like public education generally, is supported by taxes that fall heavily on working people and only lightly on corporations. Spared the cost of on-the-job training, local industry profits from the arrangement. Social planners also like the idea that vocational courses keep unemployed young people off the streets and dampen discontent. A lot of Hispanic and black students are tracked into these courses. Despite such programs, unemployment continues to increase as industry cuts back production and moves its operations to the non-unionized labor markets of the South and to the Third World. These students may never find steady work as welders.



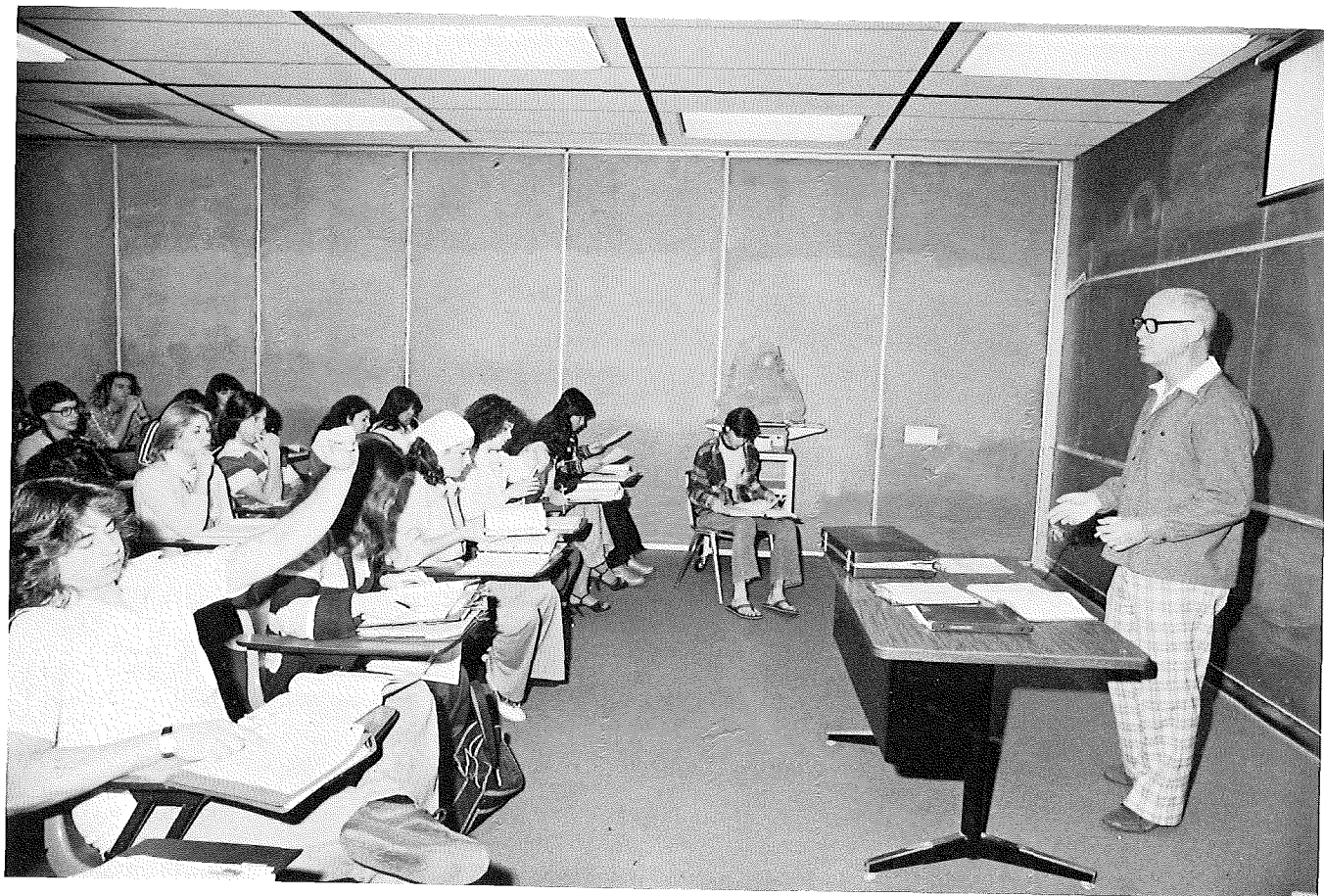
Two students look up from their machines. They are learning key-punch operation in a business information systems course. This junior college delivers a lot of students, mostly women, to surrounding corporations with a need for clerical and low-level computer workers. Key punch is the lowest level of computer work, rivaling the assembly line in its brain-numbing routine.



In the room next to the women key-punch students, a computer programmer stops for a moment, smiles, then looks solemn. I don't talk to him much, but later a friend, a union activist at the college, tells me a story about programmers. Most move frequently from job to job, since their skills are in high demand. Some are active in the faculty-staff union, which is auditing the financial records of the college in an attempt to prove that the administrators and not the workers are responsible for a serious budget crisis. Some programmers know that the computer records have been deliberately altered to obscure illegal administrative expenses. They know how to help open the books, and they know the risks involved. This may or may not be a true story. This may or may not be a lesson in resistance.



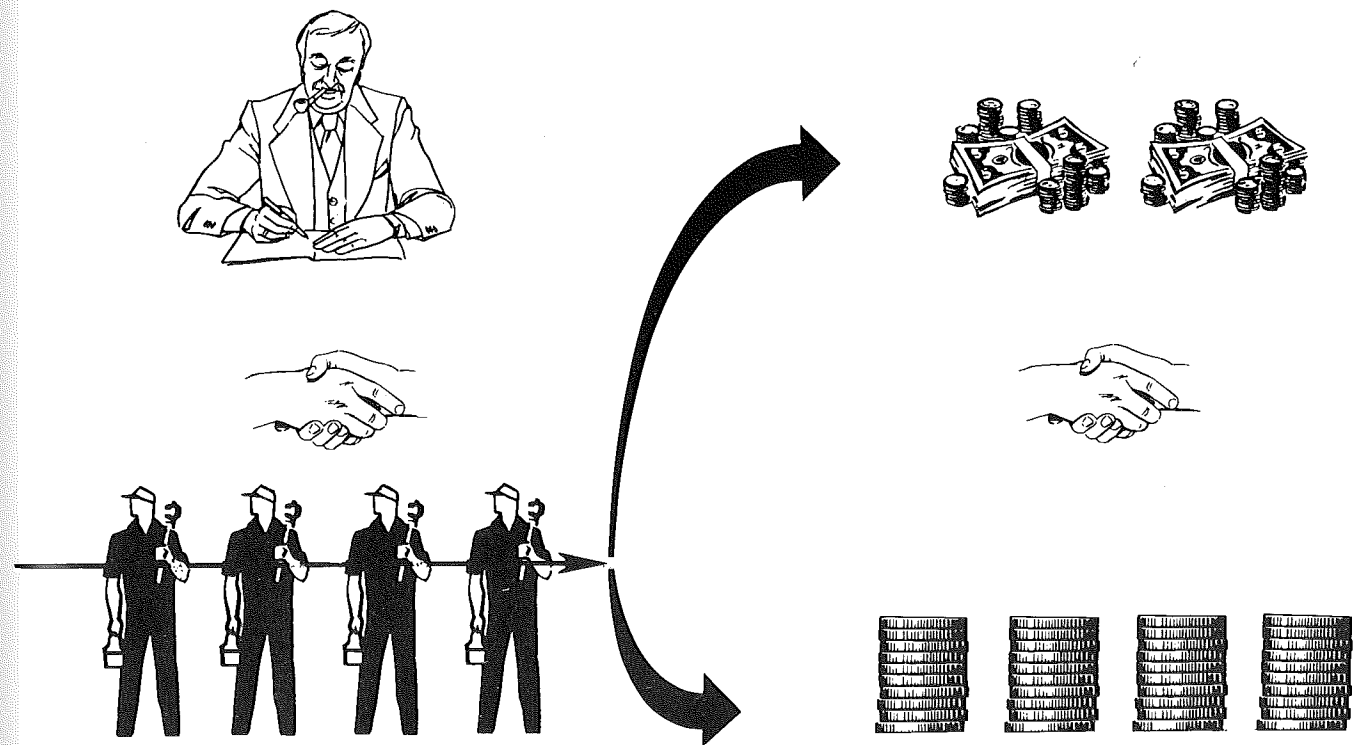
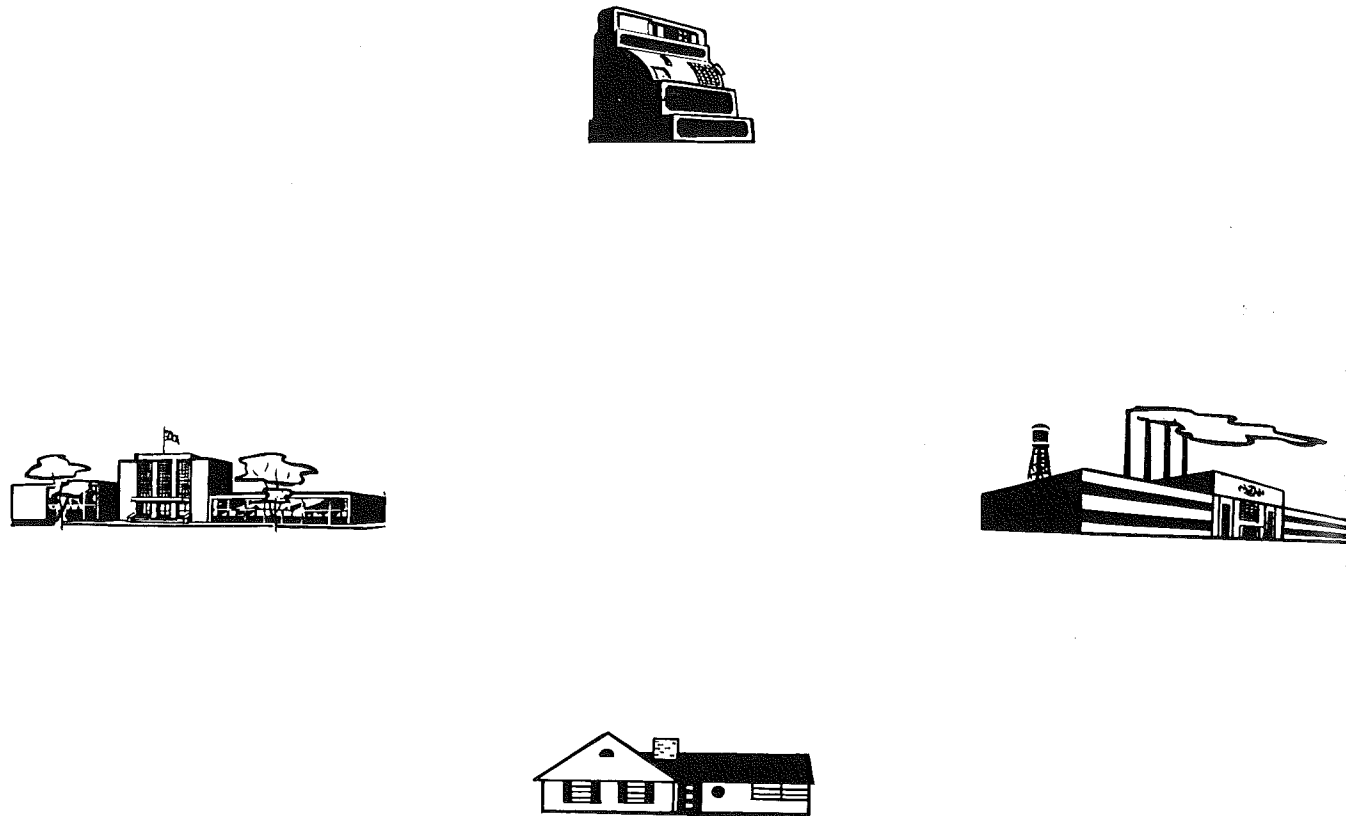
A businessman holds a plastic schoolhouse, a funnel full of figurines and a good cigar in a corporate landscape. This crude drama of educational opportunity takes place in front of one of the many computer firms in this region. The streets here are named for famous scientists, inventors, and industrialists. Thus even maps celebrate the fusion of organized science and big business. One can stand at the intersection of Dupont and Teller and think, or not think, about the march from gunpowder to the hydrogen bomb.



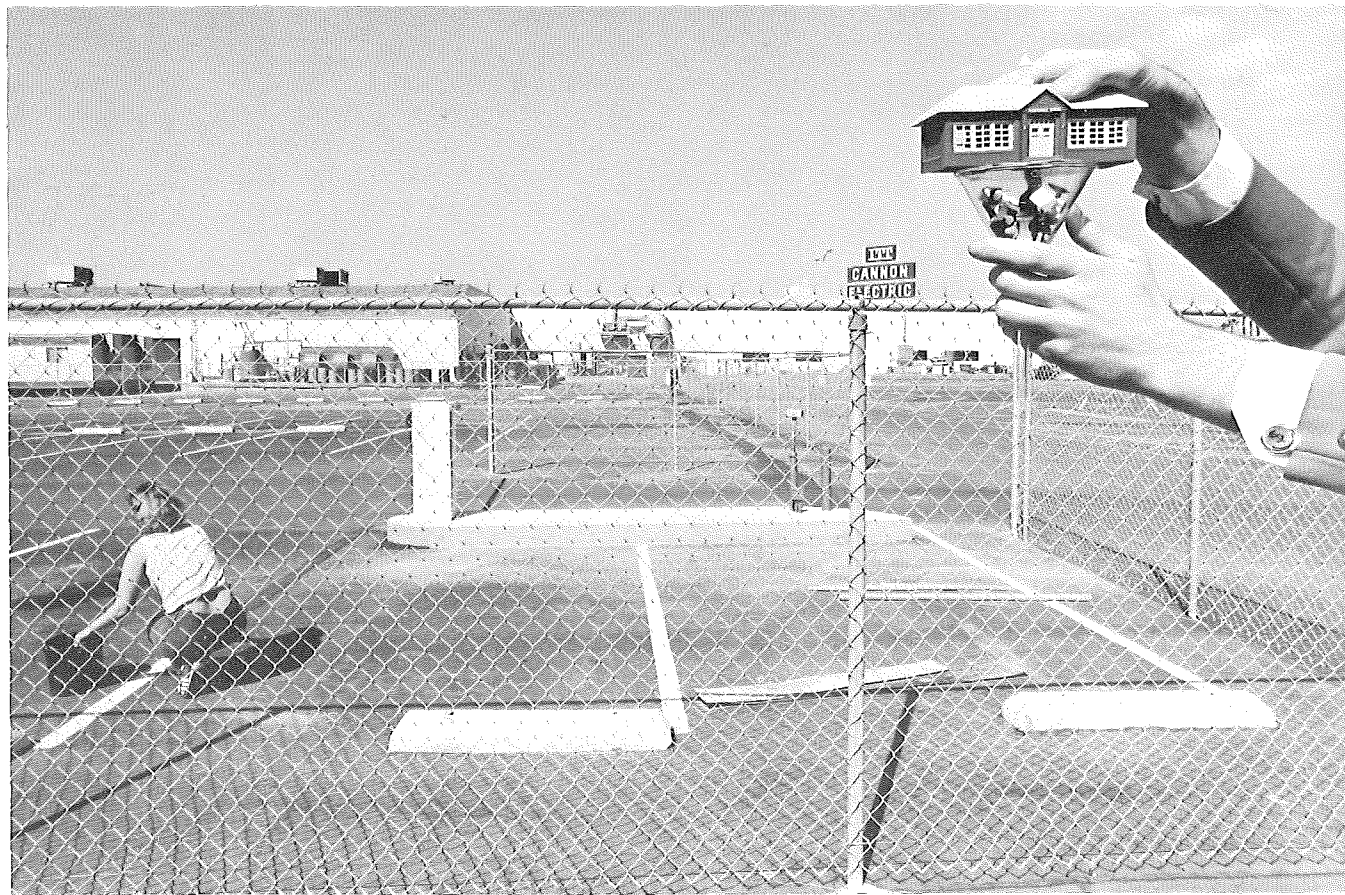
A mathematics instructor quizzes his students. Most of them are taking math for practical, vocational reasons. Very few, if any, will get to be scientists, engineers, or mathematicians. This is not a matter of talent or ability, but a matter of social channeling. There are more prestigious schools for the higher professions.



A half-abandoned shopping center, only minutes by car from the college scenes you've been looking at.

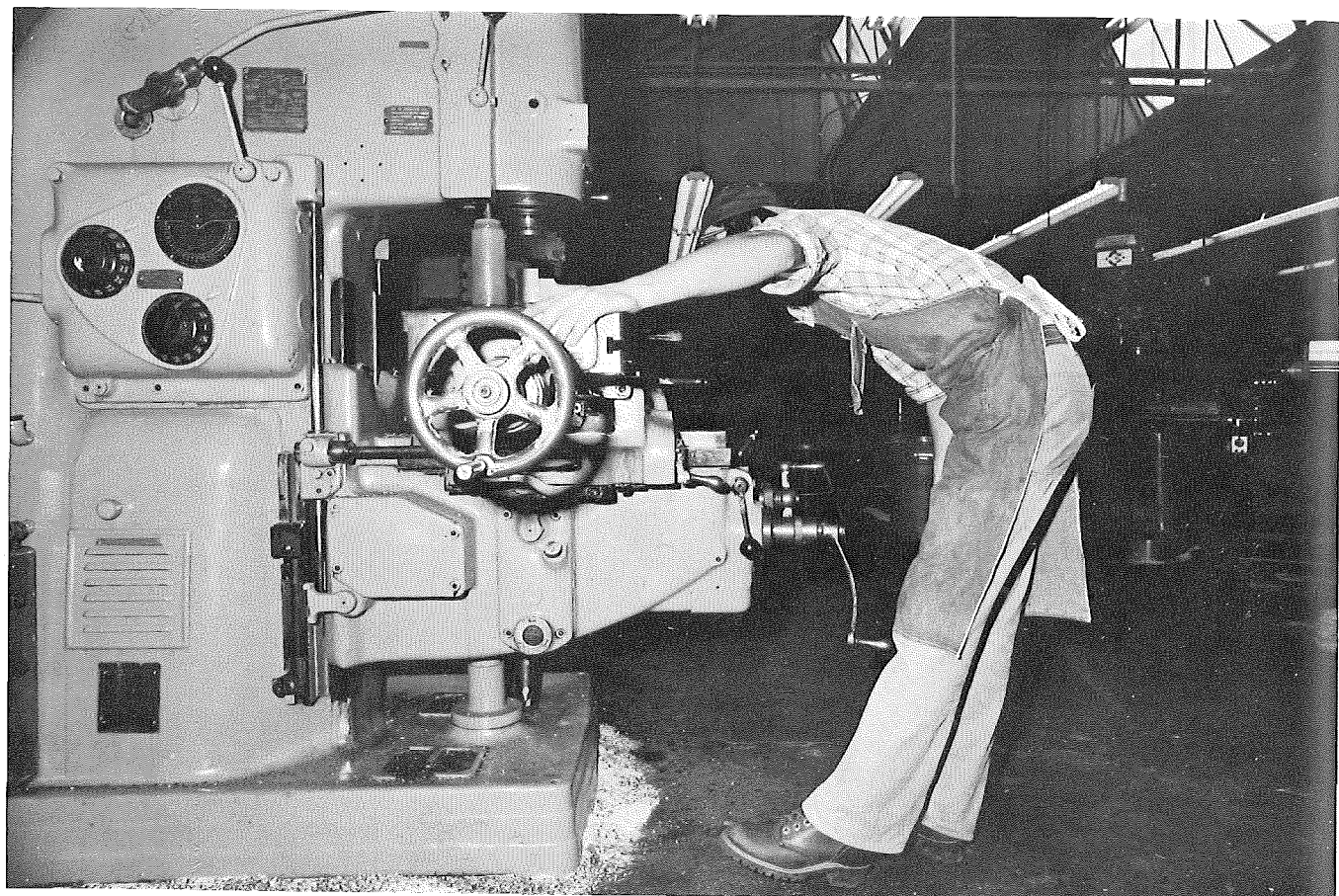


THE FETISHISM OF THE COMMODITY AND ITS SECRET



Funny things happen in this landscape of factories disguised as parks. Corporate executives decide to relocate their plants, often moving from the Hispanic and black inner districts to the orange groves near the coast. Now, these managers drive only a short distance from their beach-front homes to their work. But somehow real-estate interests and manufacturing interests come into conflict. Things are not working smoothly here under the palm trees. Escalating property values make it impossible for lower and middle level employees to find housing. So now a new, less privileged group of commuters join the traffic on the freeways of Southern California, cursing and dreaming their long way to work.

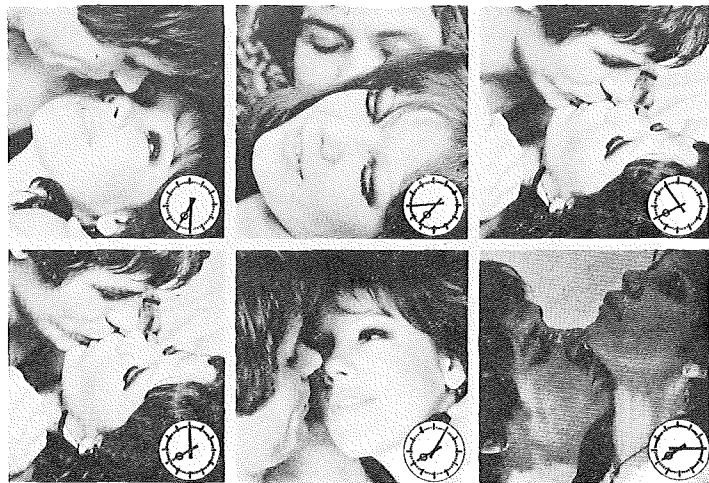




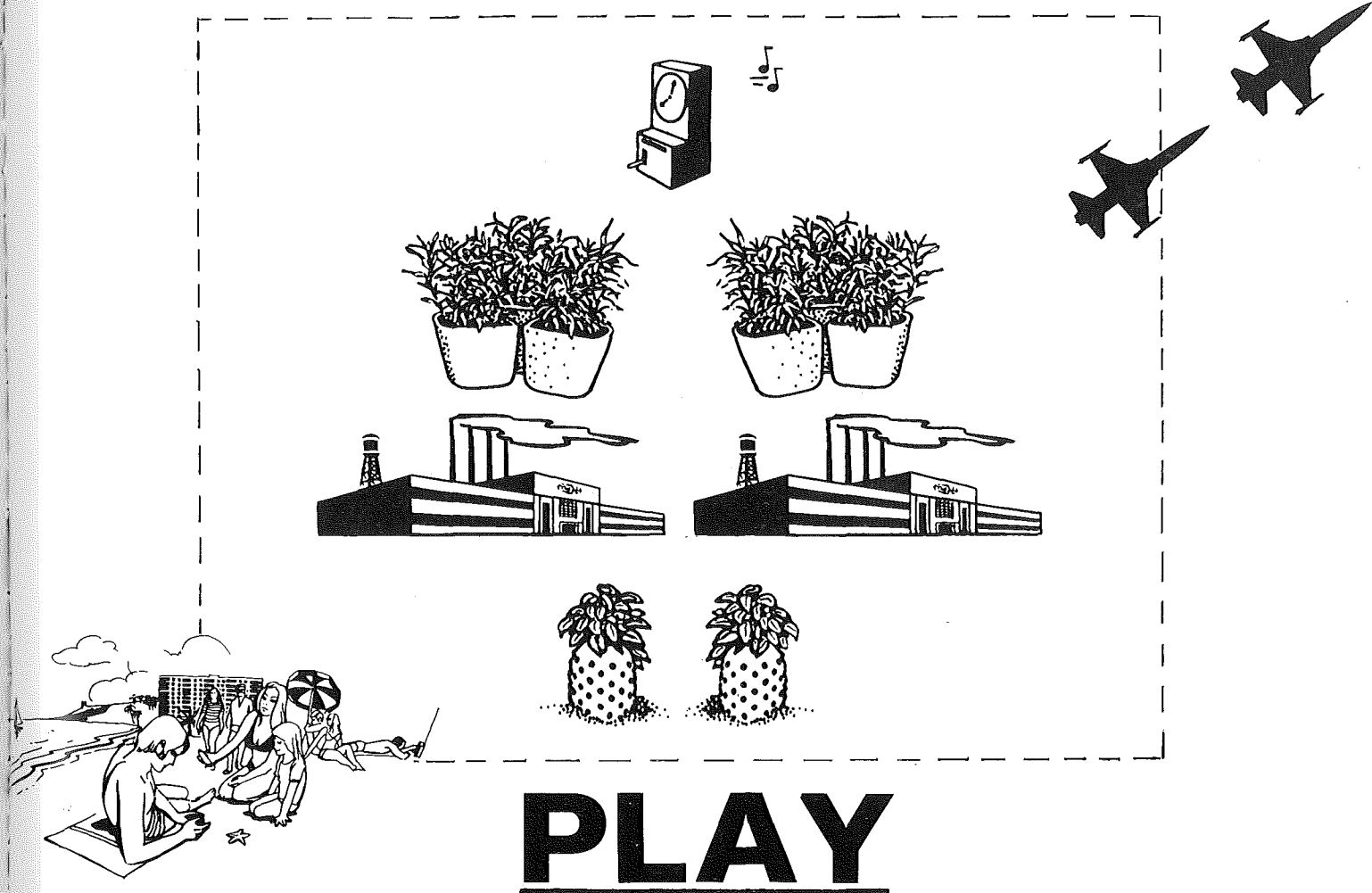
This student runs a milling machine. He studies machine technology and business administration, hoping to own his own machine shop one day. Around him are newer computer-controlled milling machines, machines which require less graceful, careful attention but rather a nervous, jerky movement between the machine and the punched tape which controls the machine. Also around him in this big room are many Vietnamese refugees, some of whom will become machinists in the military production plants in the area.



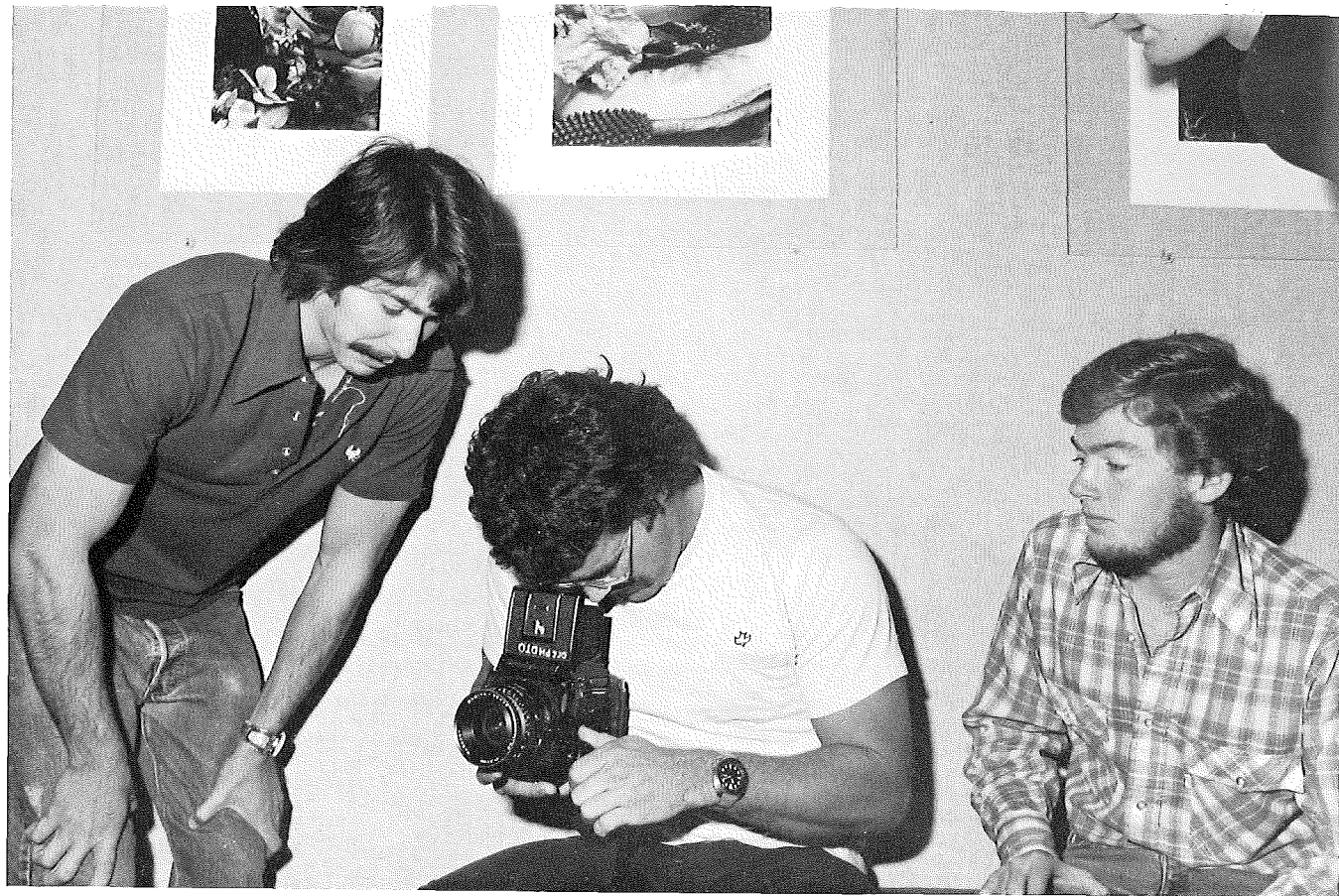
One of my students was a welder. He had worked in a large shipyard in Los Angeles harbor, but the danger, low pay, and periodic layoffs drove him to a better-paying job as a welder at Disneyland. Now, instead of welding navy ships and oil tankers, he helps build the hidden machineries of an amusement park. He works the night shift, since all construction and repair work is done when the park is closed. So he goes off to work after class. He tells me of the disdain directed at Disneyland's manual workers by the middle-class college students who serve as guides and performers. He tells me of welding at night, as the fog rolls in from the ocean, filling the streets of Fantasyland, and obscuring the artificial peak of the Matterhorn.



WORK



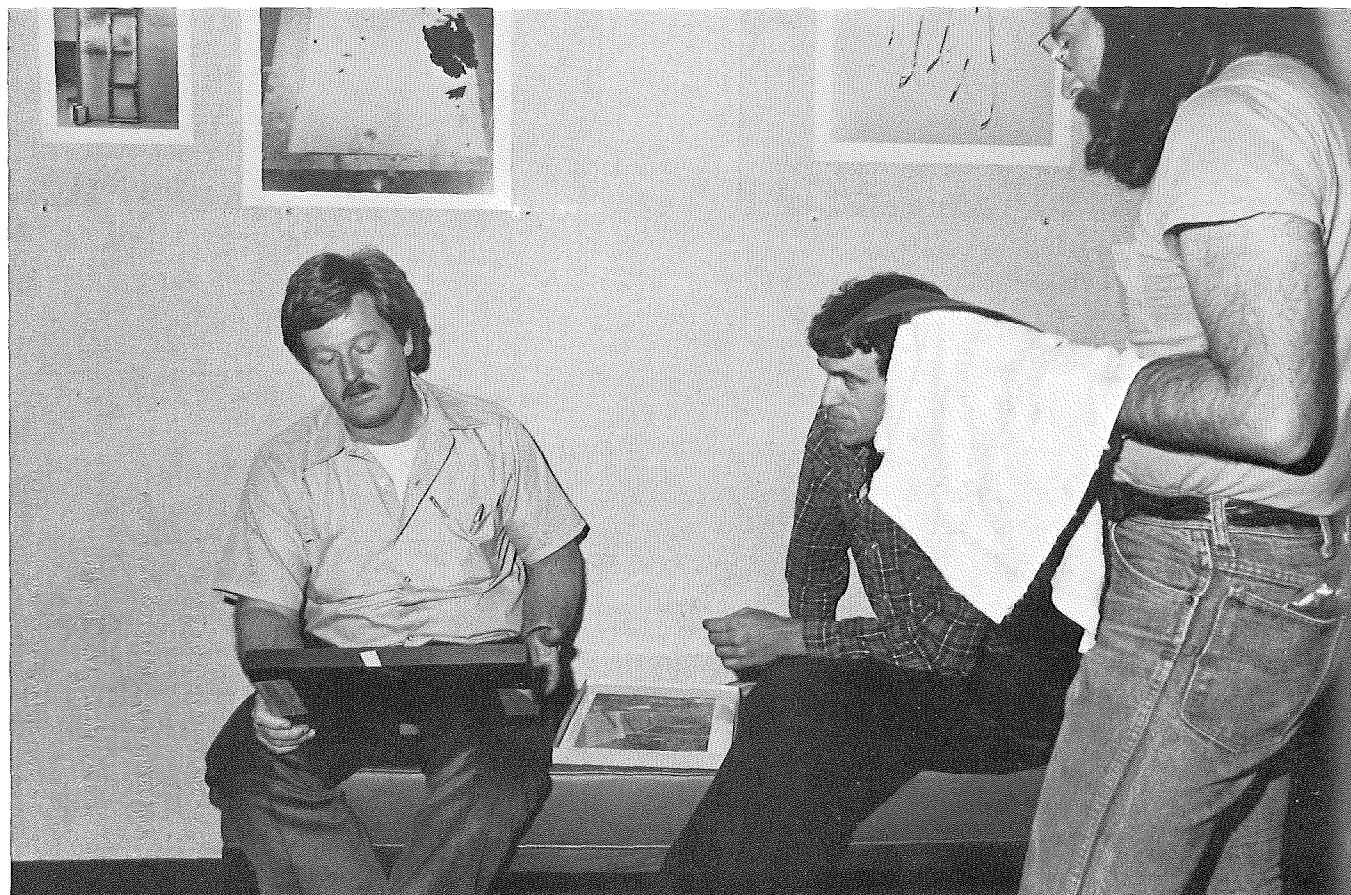
PLAY



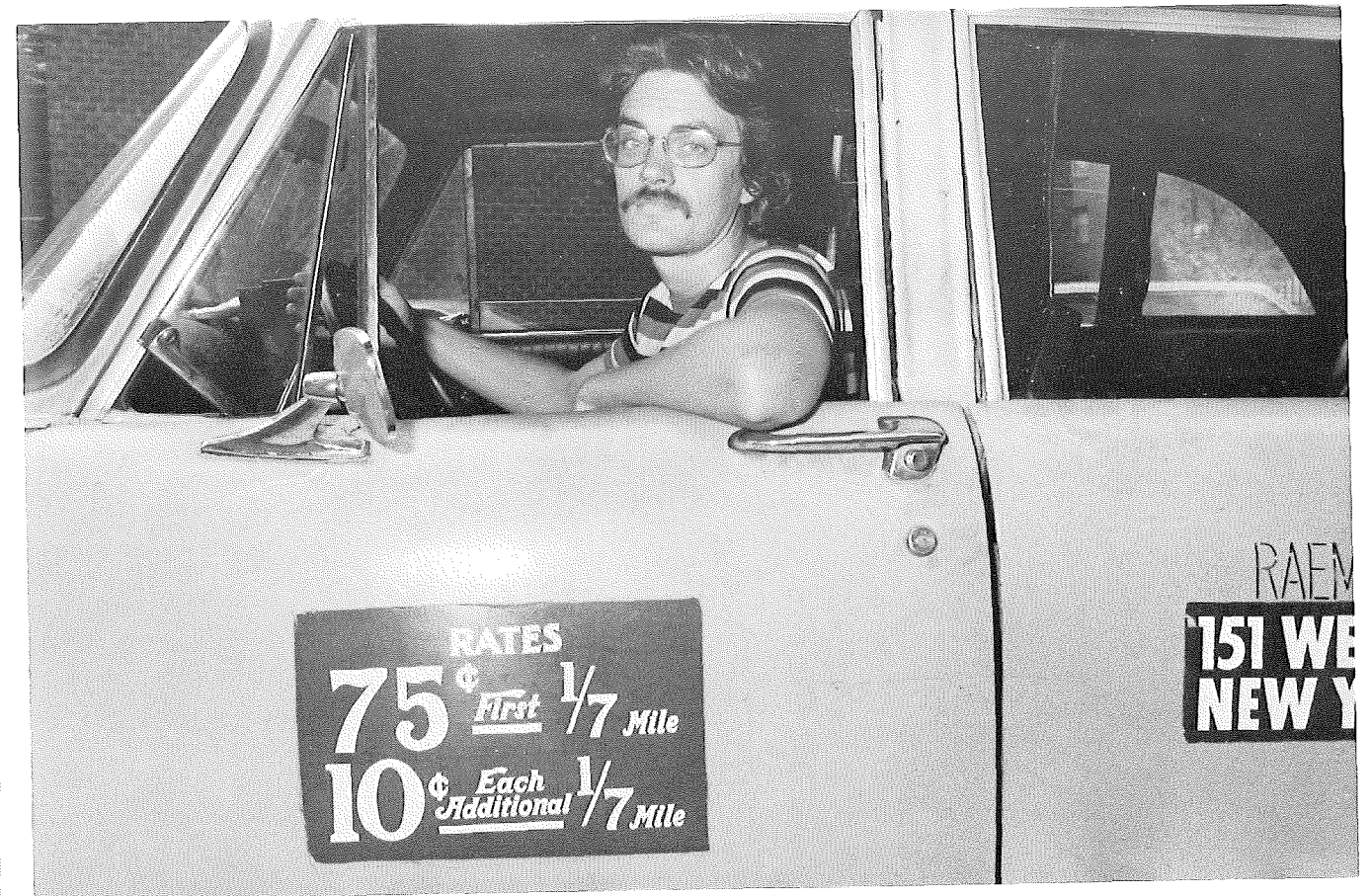
Four male commercial photography students inspect a camera in front of an exhibit of a well-known woman art photographer's work, prints with certain vegetable-erotic overtones. Most commercial photography students learn to concentrate on technical matters. Nevertheless, their inspectors periodically expose them to certain privileged examples of the beautiful.



A male biology instructor looks on as a female student pours a chlorophyll solution into a funnel. More than half of the students at this college are women, while the faculty is predominantly male (and white).



This photograph was taken in a space that serves both as a gallery and as a darkroom foyer for a large photography department. A well-known photographer sits in front of an exhibit of his own color prints. He critically inspects a student's work while a second student, holding an unwashed print on a towel, looks on. Although some students from this department land commercial photography jobs, very few, if any, become exhibiting fine art photographers.



A film critic drives a cab in New York City. He was a working-class kid who managed to attend the creative writing program of an elite university. Since his writing tends to deal with the politics and ideology of Hollywood movies, he's not well paid for his efforts, and publishes in a collectively edited film journal.



An artist paints her loft, an abandoned yeshiva in a Chinese neighborhood on the Lower East Side of New York City. She works as a clerk, and barely makes ends meet. Although she's in her late thirties, she's considered a "young artist" because she's just begun to be noticed by curators and critics. Six months after her first one person show at a Fifty-seventh Street gallery, she mysteriously disappears from the art world.



Not far from Disneyland, an art museum stands at the edge of a huge "exclusive" shopping center. The trustees of the museum are aerospace executives, bankers, and fast food and car wash kings. As collectors, they seem to favor Pop art and minimal painting and sculpture. Art instructors from the community colleges bring their students to the museum to see the latest trends.

7—TELEVISION ANNOUNCING I (3-3) CSU
Prerequisite: Speech 3 and Television 9 and 46 with grades of "C" or better, or by examination.
Required of all TV Broadcasting majors.
Training in radio and television announcing for newscasts, ad-libbing, commercials, sportscasts, and various program performance assignments with emphasis on the development of the student's individual style and personality. Practice in presenting the "personal you" over the mike and to the TV camera.

Los Angeles City College General Catalog, 1978-79

Beginning Video/Performance
Howard Fried
class defies description
teacher defies description
teacher defies class description

teacher defies convention
students defy conventions
students defy conventions teacher

art defies authority
revolution defies authority
art defies revolutionary authority

San Francisco Art Institute College Catalog, 1979-81

13—WORKSHOP IN THE ANIMATION FILM (4-4) O
Prerequisite: Cinema 1 and 2 with grades of "C" or better, or by permission of instructor. Equipment deposit, \$10.00
Required of Cinema majors.
Laboratory, 10 hours.
An introduction to the theory and practice of animation. An examination of the different types of animation, and the creative use of titles in films. Emphasis on design, timing and the technical possibilities of the camera. Drawing skill is not essential.

Los Angeles City College General Catalog, 1978-79

800 Film Cartoonists Threaten Strike

Walkout Planned Monday Over Work Being Sent Overseas

BY TIM WATERS
Times Staff Writer

Hanna-Barbera declined to comment on the matter, but the producers who are talking admit that much work is being moved overseas. And they also estimate a studio can generally cut total production costs nearly 50% by having the work done in Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Australia and other countries.

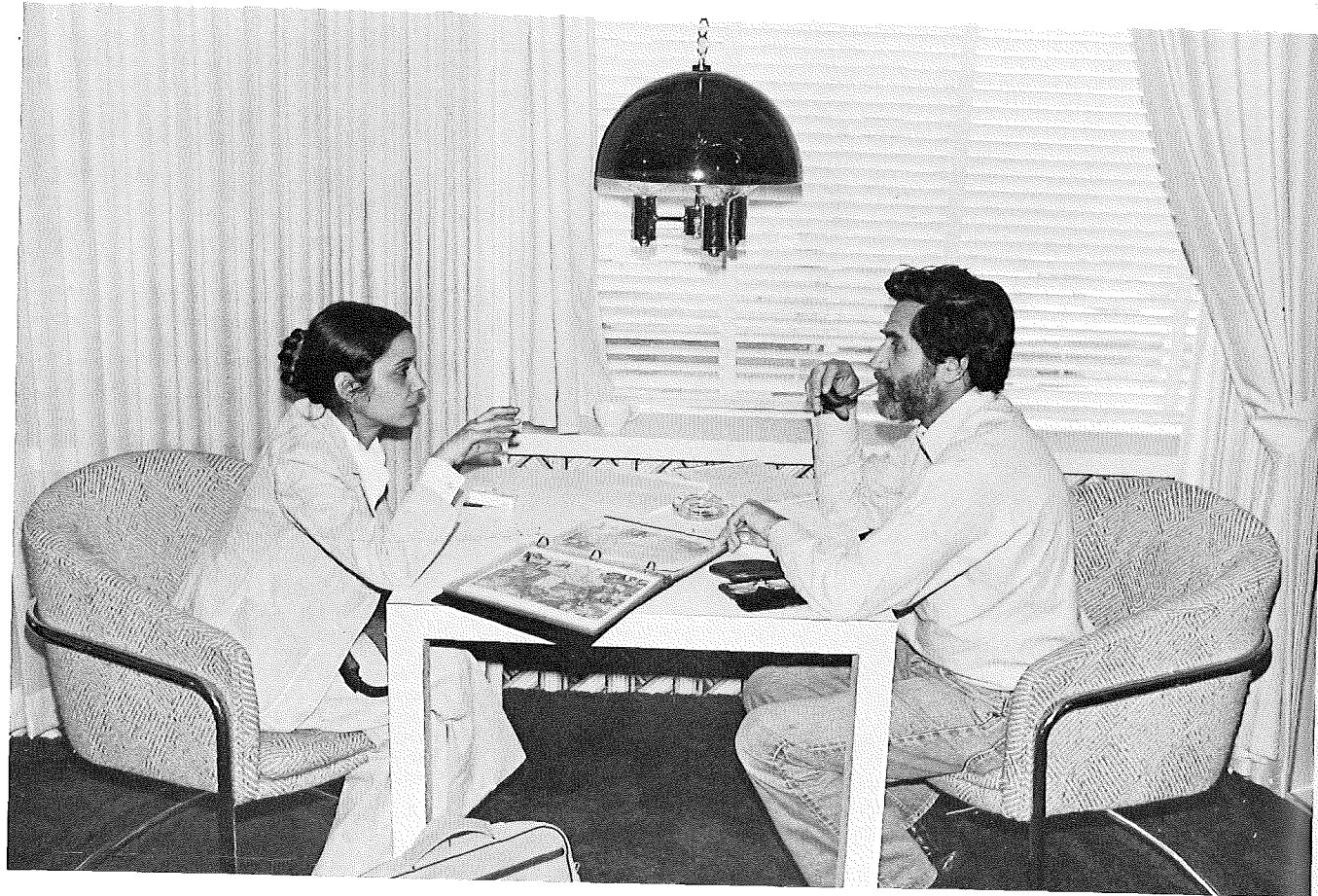
The local, which is a member of the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees, was given the authority to call a strike by its members Aug. 1. It was the first time members have authorized a strike over the loss of work, although the leadership has twice before asked them to do so.

Hester attributed this to a new activist spirit within the union, especially among the younger women, who compose the majority of the local's technical workers.
"Now, without a doubt," he said, "nine-tenths of our women are self-supporting. Before, most of them were married and they accepted the five or six months of unemployment and then collected their unemployment checks. Now we have a lot more women who need a steady paycheck coming in."

Los Angeles Times, August 11, 1979

In the midst of standardized and administered human units, the individual lives on. He is even placed under protection and gains monopoly value. But he is in truth merely the function of his own uniqueness, a showpiece like the deformed who were stared at with astonishment and mocked by children. Since he no longer leads an independent economic existence, his character falls into contradiction with his objective social role. Precisely for the sake of this contradiction, he is sheltered in a nature preserve, enjoyed in leisurely contemplation.

Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 1951



This photograph was taken at a Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles. A well-known avant-garde artist and tenured professor at a university in Southern California interviews a less well-known artist for a teaching position. Since she's female and Hispanic, the mere fact of the interview satisfies affirmative action requirements. She didn't get the job.



I. The Politics of Education and the Traffic in Photographs

The arguments made by this brief text, and by the sequence of photographs and captions that precede it, refer to a problematic intersection in advanced capitalist society, that of "higher" education and the "culture industry."¹ I suspect that you and I are situated, as social actors, in that intersection, maybe directing traffic, maybe speeding through, maybe hitchhiking, maybe stalled, maybe in danger of being run over. I am interested here in speaking to whatever comforts or discomforts you might feel by virtue of the way these highways have been engineered into a larger social geography. This essay is a deliberate provocation, less an intervention from some fictitious "outside" than an argument from within.

In the "developed" world, school and the media bring a formidable play of forces to bear upon the self, transforming and supplanting the more traditional patriarchal authority that emanated from religion and family in the epochs of feudalism and entrepreneurial capitalism. Both mass schooling and mass media are developments intrinsic and necessary to the corporate capitalist world order that emerged in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the United States, the decade after the First World War saw the triumph of a new national culture, a "business" culture, reproduced through compulsory education and promulgated by mass circulation periodicals, radio and the movies. These forces sought to organize people as atomized "private individuals," motivated en masse by the prospect of consumption, thus liquidating other dangerously oppositional forms of social bonding based on class, sex, race and ethnicity.

We have been led by the champions of corporate liberalism to believe that schooling and the media are instruments of freedom. Accordingly, these institutions are seen to fulfill the democratic promise of the Enlightenment by bringing knowledge and upward social mobility within reach of everyone, by allowing each individual to reach his or her own limits. This ideology hides the relentless sorting function performed by school and media. Both institutions serve to legitimate and reproduce a strict hierarchy of power relations, tracking individuals into places in a complex social division

2. Clearly, an adequate account of the developments alluded to in the last two paragraphs would require volumes. Several recent texts come to mind as especially important: Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, New York, 1974, and David Montgomery's *Workers' Control in America*, New York, 1979, are about the corporate struggle to seize control of the labor process by means of "scientific management," thereby isolating and deskilling workers; Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness*, New York, 1976, about the growth of a consumer culture motivated by corporate advertising; Samuel Bowles's and Herbert Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America*, New York, 1976, about the historical relation of educational reform to the changing demands of a capitalist economy; and David Noble's *America by Design*, New York, 1977, about the corporate role of science and technology, with an emphasis on the instrumentalization of higher education. David N. Smith's *Who Rules the Universities?*, New York, 1974, is also valuable, as is Allen B. Ballard's *The Education of Black Folk*, New York, 1973, and the hard-to-find text by the Newt Davidson Collective, *Crisis at CUNY*, New York, 1974.

1. Conversations and teaching shared with Martha Rosler were a significant starting point for this project. Campbell Skillman offered useful advice, as did Fred Dolan, who lent a very valuable and visible hand as well. The version published here could not have appeared without the intelligence, support, and montage-sense of Sally Stein. My biggest debt is to my students, too many and at too many schools to name, who taught me a lot about dealing with these issues. The dedication is to them, and to my sisters, Victoria Sekula and Michelle Sekula, who are still dealing with the educational machine.

3. See Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York, 1970, for a very important dialectical understanding of the educational process in its dominating and liberating modes. Ira Schor's *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, Boston, 1980, does an admirable job of translating Freire's insights concerning peasant societies into terms compatible with the experience of North American working-class students. Pierre Bourdieu's and Jean-Claude Passeron's *Reproduction*, London, 1977, is theoretically dense but valuable in its attempt at a "theory of symbolic violence" in the pedagogical sphere. Adrienne Rich's essays on education in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, New York, 1979, especially the one entitled "Toward a Woman-Centered University," are among the most lucid statements I have read on the radical remaking of educational possibilities, and I am grateful to Sally Stein for directing me to them.

4. Thus there is something revealing about the very title of the journal in which this essay originally appeared. *Exposure* was founded in 1964 as a forum for college teachers of photography. In contrast, *Aperture*, founded in 1953,

of labor while suggesting that we have only ourselves to blame for our failures. School and the media effectively situate most people in a culture and economy over which they have no control, and thus are mechanisms by which an "enlightened" few promote the subtle silencing of the many.²

School and the media are inherently discursive institutions, sites within which discourse becomes a locus of symbolic force, of symbolic violence. A communicative relation is established between teacher and student, performer and audience, in which the first part, as the purveyor of official "truths," exerts an institutional authority over the second. Students and audience are reduced to the status of passive listeners, rather than active subjects of knowledge. Resistance is almost always limited only to the possibility of tuning out. Domination depends on a monologue of sorts, a "conversation" in which one party names and directs the other, while the other listens deferentially, docilely, resentfully, perhaps full of suppressed rage. When the wholly dominated listener turns to speak, it is with the internalized voice of the master. This is the dynamic of all oppressions of race, gender, and class. All dominating power functions semiotically through the naming of the other as subordinate, dependent, incomplete as a human being without the master's discipline and support. Clearly, such relationships can be overthrown; the discourse of domination finds its dialectical antagonist in a discourse and practice of liberation. Like home, factory, prison and city streets, school and the media are sites of an intense, if often covert, daily struggle in which language and power are inextricably connected.³

Most of us who have managed to develop a professional relation to the traffic in words and images (as artists, writers, or teachers) share, often unequally and competitively, in a *symbolic privilege* which situates us above whole populations of the silenced and voiceless. This role, the role of cultural mouthpiece, normally partakes in the privileging and accreditation of its own status, and that of its patrons and employers, while suggesting that culture exists for everyone, or for its own sake. A contradiction has developed between the bureaucratic and professional organization of all cultural work and the Janus-faced mythology of culture, which suggests, on the one hand, that mass culture is popular and democratic, while arguing, on the other, that high culture is an elite activity, an Olympian conversation between genius and connoisseur. High culture is increasingly no more than a specialized and pretentious variant of mass culture, speaking to an audience composed of the upper class and the intermediary strata of professionals and managers (and especially those professionals and managers whose business is culture). The star system prevails in both SoHo and Hollywood: all culture becomes publicity, a matter of *exposure*.⁴

But artists and intellectuals do not control the interlocking apparatuses of culture and education. Increasingly they are the

functionaries and employees of corporate and state institutions: primarily as teachers and grant recipients. The ideology of autonomous professionalism serves to legitimate and defend career interests while, particularly in the case of artist-teachers, building on a hollow legacy of romantic individualism. Although the myth of the lonely oppositional path retains its redemptive ideological force, artists are forced into a dreary upwardly-mobile competition for visibility, with reputation translating into career-capital. Those who refuse or fail are officially invisible, without voice. (I once heard a well-known artist characterize less well-known artists, generally, as lazy.)

The case of photography is especially poignant in this regard, since historically the medium has been central to the development of mass culture, with its necessary industrialization and proletarianization of much of cultural work. The dominant spectacle, with its seductive commodities and authoritative visual "facts," could not exist without photographs or photographers. Treated by the vigorous new art history of photography to an expanding pantheon of independent *auteurs*, we forget that most photographers are detail workers, makers of fragmentary and indeterminate visual statements. These photographs take on a more determinate meaning as they pass through a bureaucratically organized and directed process of assembly. The picture magazine is a case in point. Even the curated fine art exhibition, such as John Szarkowski's "definitive" *Mirrors and Windows* at the Museum of Modern Art, may be another. A bureaucratized high culture needs to celebrate the independent creative spirit while functionally eroding the autonomy of the artist.

If school is a factory, art departments are industrial parks in which the creative spirit, like cosmetic shrubbery or Muzak, still "lives." Photographic education is largely directed at people who will become detail workers in one sense or another. Only the most elite art schools and university art departments regularly produce graduates who will compete for recognition as fine artists. Nonetheless, the ideology of auteurism dominates the teaching of the medium's history at all levels of higher education, even in the community colleges. This auteurism actually oscillates in and out of view, sharing prominence with its opposite, technological determinism. Students learn that photographic history is driven by technical progress, except in some cases, when history is the elevated product of especially gifted artists, who are to be admired and emulated. Very few teachers acknowledge the constraints placed on their would-be *auteurs* by a system of educational tracking based on class, race, and sex.

Thus, most of us who teach, or make art, or go to school with a desire to do these things, are forced to accept that a winner's game requires losers. One can either embrace this proposition with a social-Darwinist steeling of the nerves, or pretend that it is not true while trying to survive anyway. Otherwise we might begin to work

suggested that the practice of fine-art photography involved a small hermetic circle around the guru-like figure of Minor White. One entered this circle through the smallest of apertures (f/64?), rather as if through the New Testament "eye of the needle." *Exposure* supplanted this inner-directed estheticism with a belief in outward-oriented professional boosterism appropriate to the mid-sixties era of Pop Art and growing college art teaching. Both titles share, however, in a venerable fixation with the techniques and apparatuses of photography. Thus "aperture" unites technologism and spiritualism, while "exposure" unites technologism and an incipient photographic star system, realized in the 1970s.

for a method of education and a culture based on a struggle for social equality.

II. Photographing School

Most of the photographs included here were made while I was employed as a part-time junior college instructor in one of the largest photography departments in the United States, teaching the history of photography to night students. These two-year "community" colleges constitute the lowest level of higher education in the United States, serving as training camps for technical, service, and lower-level administrative workers, and as "holding tanks" for high school graduates who would otherwise flood the labor market. These institutions have developed since the end of the second world war.

Most of my students worked: as technicians, as postal clerks, electronics assemblers, fast-food workers, welders, social workers, high-school teachers, and as housewives and mothers. A few retired people took courses. Many students had an amateur interest in the medium. Some night students would jokingly rate the classroom events against what they had missed on television. A good number of the younger students entertained serious thoughts about a career in photography, although many were confused, uncertain about the path to take, knowing that a community college education was not enough. Generally, the committed photography students felt a certain vague pride, feeling that the reputations their instructors claimed made this department a better one than most in two-year colleges. Since a number of faculty members exhibited locally and nationally, this suggested that perhaps the students, too, were on the right track. For the most part, though, the students were learning to become image technicians. Their art historical education was icing on a cake made of nuts and bolts. I tried to teach a different history of photography, one that called attention to the historical roots of this contradiction. *School Is a Factory* emerges from the problems I encountered in teaching.

I was asked to exhibit some of my photographs in a gallery run by the students. The space intrigued me not for formal reasons, but because of its dual uses, mixing both an esthetic and a technical pedagogy, while also serving as a convenient student hang-out. The work of reputable art photographers hung on the walls, almost all of it in the fine-print tradition of photography. The gallery also served as a foyer to the student darkrooms, the spaces in which purely technical concerns prevailed. I decided that the appropriate thing to do in such a space was a kind of internal critique — a questioning, fragmentary at best — moving outward from photographic education, to community college education, to the larger political economy which motivated the educational system, and then moving back to the immediate environment in which the students were situated.

A sound track provided a background of anti-Muzak, beginning with mechanically seductive disco music and ending with the flat, deadened rebelliousness of a new wave version of "Summertime Blues" recorded by the Flying Lizards. Most of the students seemed to like the Flying Lizards part a lot. The intermediary material on the tape was vocal, punctuated with the loud ticking of a darkroom timer. A monotonous monologue goes on about a "sanitary landscape," about "factories disguised as parks," while shifting suddenly to the authoritarian, double-binding voice of the institution itself: "Learn to earn, work, don't work, play, don't play. Everyone is looking at you, no one is looking at you. . . ."

But it is impossible to question authority without questioning the language of authority. These photographs are intended to work against the typical lyricism of college catalogue photography, with its celebration of joyful encounters between individuated students and the environment, objects, instruments and agents of knowledge: manicured and shaded lawns, dissected frogs, microscopes, and gesticulating professors. So I have adopted the hard flash light and the single point perspective appropriate to a rationalized, bureaucratically administered environment which is trying to pass itself off as the site of collegial pleasures and self-discovery. But it seemed important also to work against the prevailing formalism and otherworldliness of art photography, the hegemonic mannerism of a professionalized avant-garde that has turned in upon itself. I wanted to suggest that it is possible for art to deal critically with the social ground on which we stand, to speak of people's experiences in terms other than those dictated by individualism. This project involved a break with the cult of the self-sufficient visual image. I am not suggesting that this break necessitates a reversion to some rigid, positivist version of documentary characterized by an obsession with the "facts" overlaid with liberal humanist "values." It would be a mistake therefore to assume that the captions bring a clarifying or restricting sociological facticity to these photographs. Both words and pictures constitute arguments, operating at different levels of specificity, about the prevailing, rather than the idiosyncratic effects of education upon students. Although I am concerned here with the rule rather than the exception, the photographed moments are in no way evidence of an iron determinism at work. I cannot speak for the inner experience, ambitions, or future of the students and teachers who posed for me. The serious looks are as much evidence of guarded caution as anything else, since our brief interactions in the midst of business-as-usual did not provide much time for explanation. Most administrators assumed that a photographer was a potential publicist, rather than a critic, of their domain. Students were understandably reluctant to contribute to the image of the "happy scholar" — and I did not coax them.

It may appear that I am being presumptuous, immodest in my attempt to construct, with words and pictures, a modest essay on the politics of schooling. I am well aware that this project violates a

normal separation of tasks which demands that photographers restrict their activity to the field of the visual, and to the cultivation of esthetic effects. The either-or-ism that rules this separation suggests that either one makes pictures, which speak from and to the emotions, or one writes, speaking thus to the intellect. But neither words nor pictures speak exclusively to one "faculty" or another; this separation is a triumph of a specifically bourgeois psychology and philosophy of mind, enacted in the rigid division of mental labor within the culture industry.

III. An Open Conclusion

The celebration, by ruling class commissions, of universal art education, of art education as the "Fourth R" in a revamped, redecorated system of schooling, must be questioned when the same ruling class is promoting educational cutbacks at the same time.⁵ When functional literacy rates are declining, what does it mean to promote a massive shift of educational attention to the development of the esthetic faculties? This plan reads like a technocratic perversion of the liberating pedagogy envisioned by the German romantic poet Schiller in his 1793 letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*.⁶ The estheticism encouraged by the cultural bureaucrats of the 1980s stops short of a necessary integration with critical consciousness. Rather, what seems to have taken shape in these plans is a technocratic vision of a society of expressionist *units*, playing happily as consumers (of less and less) in a world in which political life is increasingly limited to a spectacle of representation. The task of progressive teachers, artists, and students is to critique this vision and combat its further realization, while preserving the awareness that utopian esthetic possibilities must be struggled for as intrinsic to a genuinely democratic future, but cannot be achieved in a society governed by a mechanical and world-threatening lust for profit and control.

1980

Postscript

School Is a Factory exists in several forms and continues to change. Since 1979, I have presented it as an exhibition, primarily at junior colleges, state universities, and art colleges. Some of the photographs appeared in a journal called *Radical Teacher*. A shorter captioned sequence of the photos appeared in *Exposure* along with the above essay. In these various contexts, the work was intended to initiate an institutional critique of a familiar social environment. In the present context, I would like to comment briefly, as a critic and historian of photography, on the pictorial conventions I am working *against*. These, then, are negative examples, although a more dialectical and detailed understanding should develop in a less schematic look at these pictures.

5. See David Rockefeller, Jr., chairman, *Coming to Our Senses: The Significance of the Arts in American Education - A Panel Report*, New York, 1977. See also the ominous remarks by Zbigniew Brezinski, who later became director of the Trilateral Commission and national security advisor to President Carter, on a projected "democracy," based not on the popular ability to influence "policy making," but on "autonomy for individual self-expression," in Daniel Bell, ed., "Toward the Year 2000: Work in Progress," *Daedalus*, Summer 1967, p. 687.

6. Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, New York, 1977. See also Herbert Marcuse, "The Aesthetic Dimension," in *Eros and Civilization*, Boston, 1955.

Consider two photographs. First, a photograph made in 1900 by the Washington, D.C. commercial photographer Frances Benjamin Johnson. Johnson came to photography from a *beaux arts* training and an early career as a commercial illustrator. The photograph comes from an album made by Johnson for the Hampton Institute, a vocational college for blacks in Virginia.⁷ The caption reads: "Stairway of Treasurer's Residence, Students at Work." The purpose of the album was promotional, serving as an aid to fund-raising. Thus the attitude of diligent and industrious servitude exhibited here might have been intended to impress white donors, like the steel manufacturer Andrew Carnegie, with the promise of converting a supposedly indolent and uneducated rural black population into disciplined, productive, and unrebelling proletarians. That this careful carpentry is being performed on a "bourgeois" interior, on the bannisters of the Hampton Institute treasurer's house, is no accident. The Hampton photographs were exhibited as well at the Paris Exposition of 1900, following the presentation of a series of Johnson photographs of the Washington, D.C. city schools at the 1899 Paris Exposition. Many of these earlier photos appeared in a series of pamphlets called *The New Education Illustrated*.

It can be argued that, although less engaged than Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine in direct Progressive Era reform politics, Johnson is an equally important pictorial ideologue of that period. Although most of her work was governed by commercial possibilities, she seems to have touched on some of the principal themes of Progressive Era politics, moving from first generation feminism, on the one hand, to the celebration of American imperialism on the other. Thus she was able to photograph both Susan B. Anthony, the feminist leader, and Admiral Dewey, commander of the victorious American fleet at Manila, in a highly celebratory fashion. Johnson was able in her school photographs to suggest the new spirit of scientific and ameliorative education. (The pragmatist John Dewey can be said to be the principal philosopher of that movement.⁸) Johnson presents the school as a total and encyclopedic institution. But the black schools like Hampton and Tuskegee were limited to vocational ends: this limitation was the source of an intense debate between the reform-minded black educator Booker T. Washington and the more radical W. E. B. DuBois, who argued for a black educational system that would include the liberal arts.⁹ Thus, what underlies the educational system that Johnson is promoting, both in her photographs of the black institutes and the then largely white public schools of Washington, D.C., is the process of a thoroughgoing *division of labor*; a division made along racial, and ethnic, lines. Although, relatively speaking, the black institutes were progressive institutions, they accepted the assignment of blacks to a subordinate position, as manual workers, in a society increasingly dominated by intellectual labor. Also, the black institutes attempted to educate for a craft system of production that was disappearing under pressure from industrial centralization and scientific man-



Figure 1: Frances Benjamin Johnson, *Stairway of Treasurer's Residence. Students at work*. Platinum print from Hampton Institute album, 1900.

7. Frances Benjamin Johnson, *The Hampton Album*, New York, 1966. This Museum of Modern Art catalogue includes 44 photographs from the original Hampton Institute album, as well as a text by Lincoln Kirstein.

8. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, New York, 1916.

9. In addition to Allen Ballard's *The Education of Black Folk*, see W. E. B. DuBois, *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960*, ed. Herbert Aptheker, New York, 1973. For an amusing and partisan summary of the differences between Washington and DuBois, see Dudley Randall's poem "Booker T. and W. E. B.," in *Poem Counterpoem*, Detroit, 1966. Randall was writing during a time of rising black demands for open admission to higher education in the United States.

10. Lewis Baltz, *The new Industrial Parks near Irvine, California/Das neue Industriegelände in der Nähe von Irvine, Kalifornien*, New York, 1975. I am referring here to Plate 47, which we were unable to reproduce.

11. *The New Topographics*, curated with an introduction by William Jenkins, International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, 1975.

agement. Johnson's photographs, with their mix of realism and an idealizing and academic neo-classical arrangement, are related to what I would call the *instrumental realism* of late nineteenth century social scientific photography.

Like many psychiatric and criminological albums, these photographs, viewed in sequence in the original album, illustrate the so-called disease and its institutional correction and cure: a kind of "before" and "after" narrative structure that in the Hampton album involves the juxtaposition of images of rural southern life with the "improved" conditions of the vocationally educated and industrially disciplined Black. Thus, behind the realist appearance of these images lies the substance of a new rationalized, and abstract, system of bureaucratic command. One could argue that the speaking subject of these photographs is not black people, taken either collectively or individually, but the *institution* of modern education. I am taking Johnson's photograph here as a *model* for what followed in virtually every college catalogue published in America. What I wanted to achieve in *School Is a Factory* is a way of turning such conventions inside-out, or upside-down, to reveal their contradictions.

But just as I am opposed to the optimistic and disciplined realism of the Johnson photograph, so also I have problems with the following example of American late-modernist photography. Consider a photograph by Lewis Baltz published in 1975 by Castelli Graphics in an English and German language book called *The new Industrial Parks near Irvine California*.¹⁰ This happens to be the "landscape" in which I taught, the "landscape" within which *School Is a Factory* was made. What seems crucial to Baltz's work, and what makes it an exemplar, along with the work of Diane Arbus, among late-modernist photography in the United States, is its fundamental ambiguity in relation to the question of genre. Is this a documentary photograph or an abstraction? Baltz himself makes statements which embrace this ambiguity. And a whole new genre, a genre between genres, has arisen to give this ambiguity its proper place. The American curator William Jenkins has christened this work, along with the much more rigorously typological work of Bernd and Hilla Becher, and that of Robert Adams, Joe Deal, Nicholas Nixon, and others as the New Topographics.¹¹ These "photographs of a man-altered landscape" derive their ambiguity precisely from the absence of the human figure. (By the way, I am not suggesting that the addition of a human figure would necessarily humanize these images.) In the case of Baltz, a depopulated industrial environment provides the source for photographs that often resemble late-modernist abstract painting, in this example the work of Barnett Newman is suggested. Obviously, art photography is still haunted by the ghost of pictorialism, the need to affiliate itself referentially with painting. Baltz then, is a good example of the so-called "loss of the referent" within late modernist culture. Increasingly, one specialized sign system can only refer to itself, or to

another specialized sign system. Problems of communication are reduced to problems of self-referentiality, or to problems of translation. I should note that the very term “industrial park” is a linguistic trick, a mystifying translation of a site of production into a site of imaginary leisure. No two terms could be more incompatible, and yet what is suggested by this oxymoronic rhetorical construction is “clean industry,” industry without industrialism.

What I hope to criticize here, then, are two related kinds of *abstraction*. First, we have the abstraction inherent in the supposedly *realistic* world picture of a bureaucratic, commodity centered society: the abstraction that emerges from the triumph of exchange value over use value, from the triumph of abstract intellectual labor over manual labor, from the triumph of instrumental reason over critical reason. (My thinking on these issues owes a lot to the German philosopher Alfred Sohn-Rethel.¹²) The second abstraction is that which emerges from the separation of esthetic culture from the rest of life, the abstraction process central to the career of modernism (and postmodernism), the abstraction that finds an exemplary esthetic freedom in the disengaged play of signifiers. What I hope to substitute for these two powerful tendencies, which correspond roughly to the realms of “applied” and “pure” photography, is for the moment a kind of political geography, a way of talking, with words and images about both the system and *our* lives within the system.

1982

12. Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology*, London, 1978.

Sketch for a Geography Lesson



Religion is the dream of the human mind. But even in dreams we do not find ourselves in emptiness or in heaven, but on earth, in the realm of reality; we only see real things in the entrancing splendour of imagination and caprice, instead of in the simple daylight of reality and necessity. Hence I do nothing more to religion . . . than to open its eyes, or rather to turn its gaze from the internal towards the external, i.e., I change the object as it is in the imagination into the object as it is in reality.

But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, fancy to reality, the appearance to the essence, this change, inasmuch as it does away with illusion, is an absolute annihilation, or at least a reckless profanation; for in these days illusion only is sacred, truth profane.

Ludwig Feuerbach, **The Essence of Christianity**, 1843

And indeed we can suppose that the time will come — even if it is far in the future — when technique and the easy domination by men of the most powerful forces of nature will reach a stage which makes the application of the technique of murder quite impossible, since it would mean the self-destruction of the human race. The exploitation of technical progress will then take on a new character; from a basically plutocratic activity it will to a certain extent become a democratic, general human possibility.

Karl Liebknecht, **Militarism and Anti-Militarism**, 1907

The United States should plan to defeat the Soviet Union and do so at a cost that would not prohibit U.S. recovery. Washington should identify war aims that in the last resort would contemplate the destruction of Soviet political authority and the emergence of a postwar world compatible with Western values.

Colin Gray and Keith Payne, "Victory is Possible,"
Foreign Policy, Summer 1980

It would be a survival of some of your people and some of your facilities that you could start again. It would not be anything that I think in our society you would consider acceptable but then we have a different regard for human life than those monsters do.

Ronald Reagan, interview by Robert Scheer,
Los Angeles Times, January 24, 1980

But the reason for the godlessness with regard to Communism — here is a direct teaching of the child from the beginning of its life that it is a human being whose only importance is its contribution to the state — that they are wards of the state — that they exist only for that purpose, and that there is no God, they are just an accident of nature. The result is, this is why they have no respect for human life, for the dignity of the individual.

Ronald Reagan, interview by Robert Scheer,
Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1980

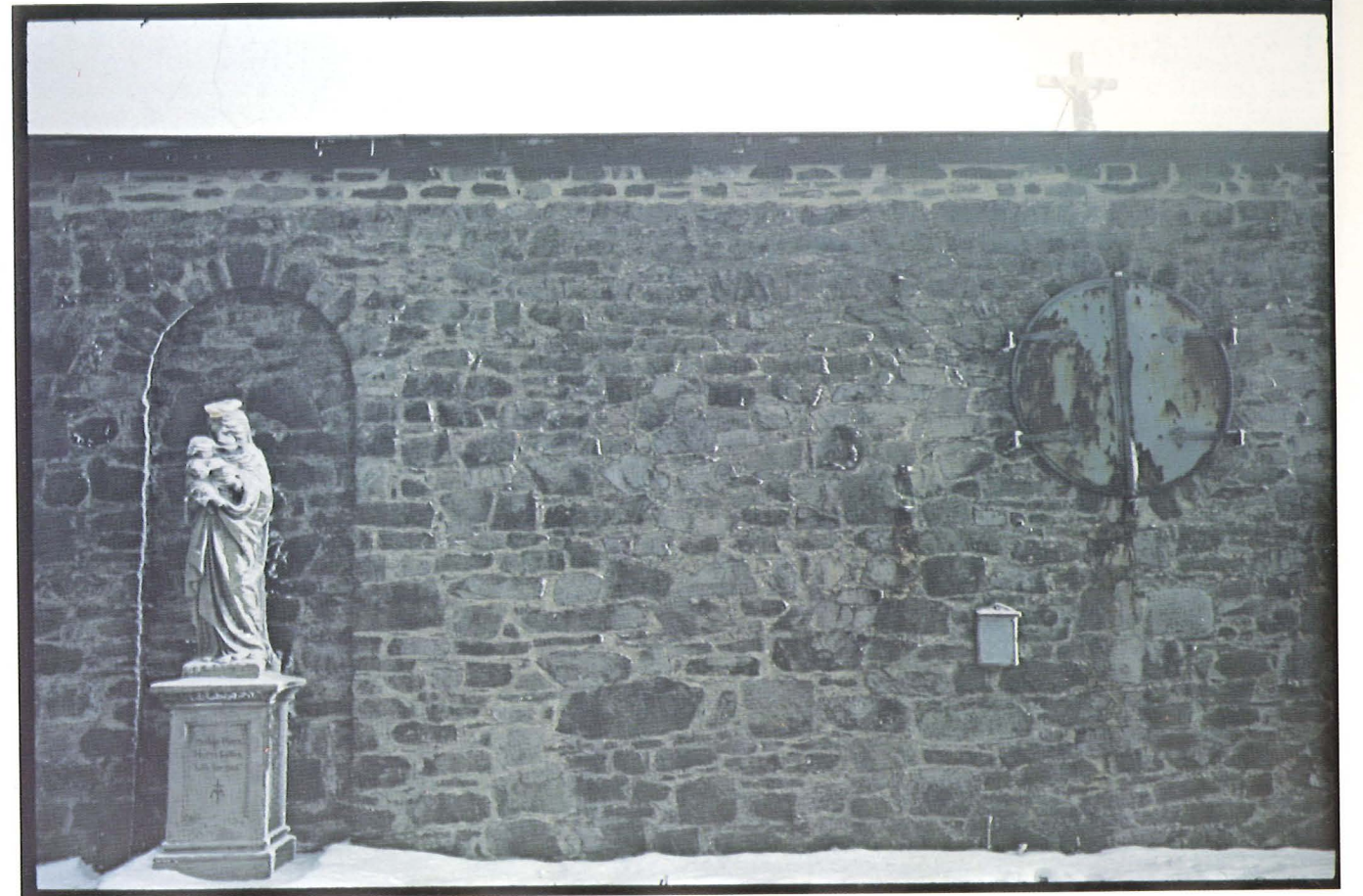
Weinberger, moreover, skillfully presents his arguments in ways most likely to catch the President's attention and approval. On at least one occasion, the Defense Secretary did not really need words at all: during a crucial budget session in September 1981, when many White House aides were urging Reagan to cut defense funds, Weinberger simply presented charts illustrating the various proposed budgets. The one with Weinberger's numbers was labeled REAGAN BUDGET, and showed a brawny soldier hoisting an automatic weapon. The alternative was called OMB BUDGET, and pictured a puny man with a small rifle.

Time, December 20, 1982













These photographs were made in West Germany and in Ohio, in my living room. In one sense, they are tourist pictures. In another sense, they are cold war pictures.

The nine color photographs were taken in January 1982 in Hesse and northern Bavaria, in villages and countryside very close to the East German border. This is a farming region, a poor region, seemingly bypassed by the "economic miracle" of postwar German recovery. The U.S. Army is a big economic and technological presence in the area. Fulda, the one city in the region, is a garrison town with GI bars and GI brothels. American military convoys roam the highways near the border. Tanks prowl the forests. The highest mountain here houses a ski resort and an American radar base. The second highest mountain was once a Celtic hill fortress, built in the first century B.C. as a defense against German tribes that were moving east. Now the druids have been replaced by saints and madonnas; a Roman Catholic chapel tops the mountain. As we walked in this once sacred forest, we could hear land mines exploding from the extreme cold. The border was only a kilometer or so away.

Should I tell you anything more specific about these small glimpses of Germany? Is it important to know that the second and third color photographs were taken on opposite sides of the same street, or that the monument next to the crucifix commemorates the dead and missing of the two world wars, or that the cow's blood is being collected for sausage, or that the border was a tourist attraction although a nearby Nazi labor camp was unmarked and seemingly unremembered? Whose land is this, whose landscape, whose terrain?

Should I tell you that another image filled the mental vacancy of this "vacation?" I remembered a picture from my childhood, an illustration from a Catholic children's encyclopedia, published during the first cold war. Like the memorials around Fulda, this encyclopedia erased fascism from history, and pointed with fear to the Soviet East. We didn't own a television, and I was fascinated by these weird brightly-colored didactic pictures. Recently I telephoned my sister, ten years younger than I, and she remembered the same image almost immediately. She sent it to me:



IMAGINATION— is the power of forming images in the mind. A person may wish to think about some person or place, and he calls up pictures and sounds in his mind. Other images also come to our minds, such as things we hear or read about in stories. We can use our imagination in our prayers. For instance, when we are saying our rosary and meditating on the mysteries, we can imagine we see Our Lord and Our Blessed Mother before us as we pray.

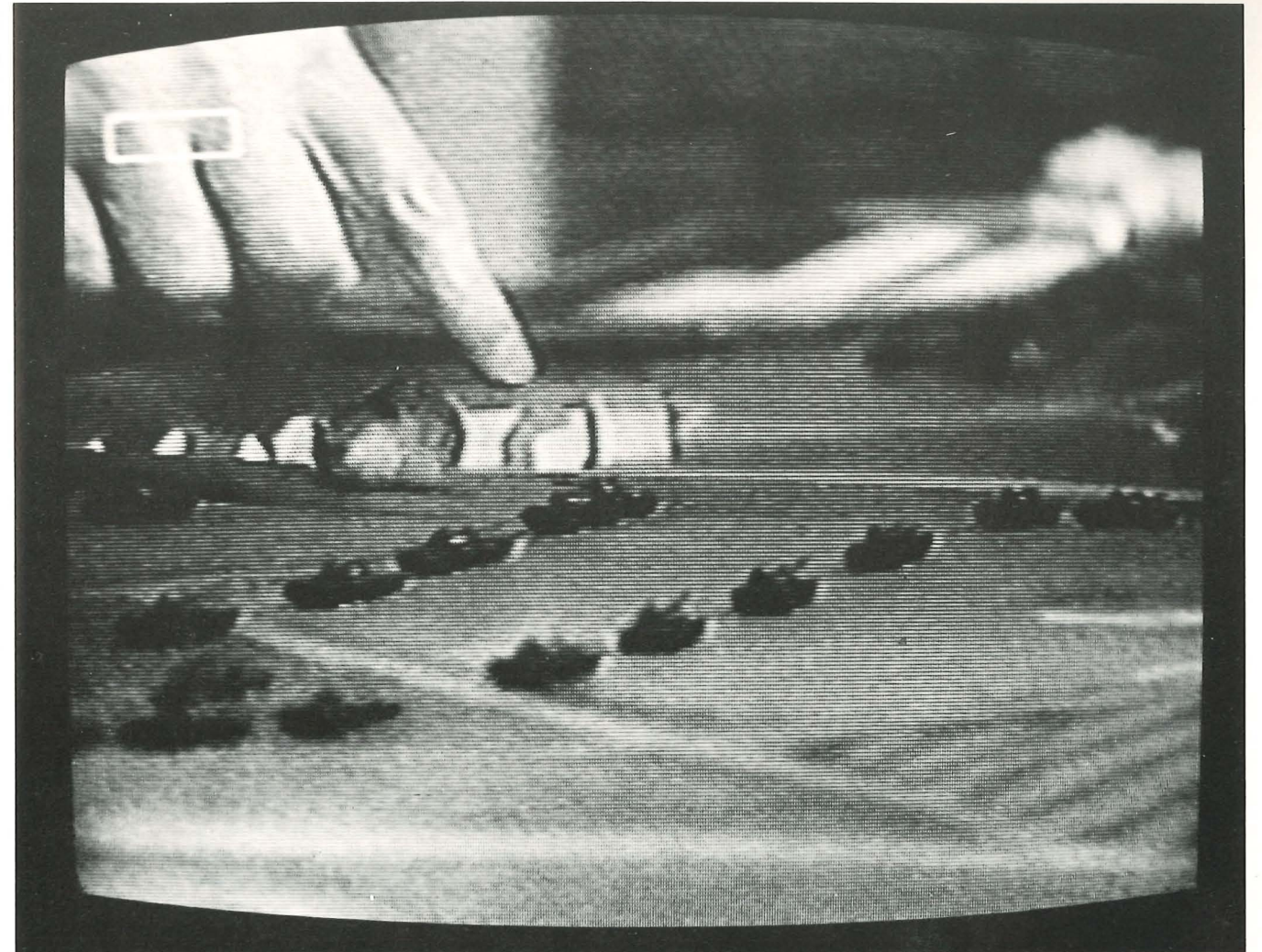
Bavaria and rural Hesse are predominantly Catholic regions of Germany and strongholds of the two main right-wing parties, the Christian Democratic Union and its affiliate, the Christian Social Union. However, in September of 1982 the anti-war party, the Greens, won 8 percent of the vote in Hesse state elections. In Hesse and throughout Germany, the Greens became an important counterforce to belligerent moves by the United States, NATO, and the new Chancellor, Helmut Kohl of the CDU. The *New York Times* worried about the effects of this development on support for American policy in Germany. Describing the Greens as if they were an atavistic and irrational force in German politics, a *Times* article published three days after the Hesse elections concluded with the following dire warning: "And, with the Greens lurking in the hills of this menacing landscape, there is little wonder that many Germans are edgy in the aftermath of Hesse." But many Germans are also edgy about being caught in a nuclear war.

American policy now argues that the Soviet Union is preparing for the military conquest of Western Europe. NATO generals claim that any Warsaw Pact attack on West Germany would begin in the area around Fulda. Consequently, this region is regarded as a likely site for the "defensive" use of nuclear weapons. Yet while we were in Germany it seemed that official American fears were ultimately more economic than military, once layers of bellicose rhetoric were stripped away. In early 1982, the Americans were attempting to block the construction of a natural gas pipeline from the Soviet Union to Western Europe. This attempt to maintain American control of Europe energy resources was in keeping with economic policy formulated in the 1940s. In this current context it became hard to distinguish war preparations from economic strategies.

The black and white television stills were taken from a program produced in April 1982 in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus is a big test market. Partly as a result of its demographic interest to marketing specialists, Columbus was the first American city to be introduced to coaxial cable television. This form of direct subscription television is also called "interactive TV," which means in effect that cable television viewers can press buttons to vote on their favorite soap opera stars and democratically advise script-writers and football coaches on their future moves. On this occasion, the audience was invited to participate in a war game. The war was directed by two U.S. Army officers (ROTC professors from Ohio State University) and an affable hostess. Viewers were asked to decide whether they wanted to fire artillery or launch missiles. Their votes were tabulated and instantaneously translated into tactics.

Although the television audience was never informed of the fact, this imaginary war was fought on a plastic relief map of the countryside around Fulda. Normally this map is used to prepare future officers for war. But this time, American civilians were offered a more abstract geography lesson: America's borders are everywhere.

1983



Sources and Credits

Sources

"On the Invention of Photographic Meaning," was published in *Artforum*, vol. XIII, no. 5, January 1975, © Artforum International Magazine, Inc.

"Paparazzo Notes," was published as an untitled book review of Ron Galella's *Jacqueline* in *Artforum*, vol. XIII, no. 8, April 1975, © Artforum International Magazine, Inc.

"The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War," was published in *Artforum*, vol. XIV, no. 4, December 1975, © Artforum International Magazine, Inc.

An earlier version of "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)," entitled "Reinventing Documentary," was published in an exhibition catalogue of Fred Lonidier's *The Health and Safety Game* and Philip A. Steinmetz's *Somebody's Making a Mistake*, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California, 1976. The present version was published in the *Massachusetts Review*, vol. XIX, No. 4, December 1978, © The Massachusetts Review, Inc.

"The Traffic in Photographs" was first delivered in its present version at the Vancouver Conference on Modernism at the University of British Columbia in March 1981 and published in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Serge Guilbaut, and David Solkin, eds., *Modernism and Modernity*, Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983. The essay was first published in the *Art Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1, Spring 1981, reprinted with the permission of the College Art Association.

The commentary and six photographs from "Aerospace Folktales" were published in *Journal*, no. 3, December 1974.

"Meditations on the Triptych" was published in *Afterimage*, vol. 6, nos. 1-2, Summer 1978.

A shorter version of "School Is a Factory" was published in *Exposure*, vol. 15, nos. 3-4, Fall and Winter 1980. The postscript was delivered as part of a talk at a conference entitled "Fotografie im Sozialen Kontext: Geschichte und Heutige Praxis," Folkwang Museum, Essen, Federal Republic of Germany, January 1982.

Earlier versions of "Sketch for a Geography Lesson" were published in *Incite*, vol. 1, no. 2, October 1983; and in the exhibition catalogue *Art and Ideology*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984. A German version entitled "Entwurf einer Geographiestunde" was published in the exhibition catalogue *Dokumentarfotografie aus den Vereinigten Staaten*, Folkwang Museum, Essen, 1984.

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The copy negatives for the illustrations on pages 2, 8, 12, 20, 23, 31, 48, and 92 and the black and white internegatives from the author's color transparencies on pages 186-187 were made by Clara Murray and printed by Vincent Leo. The titles for *Aerospace Folktales* were printed by Blake Fitzpatrick. All other original black and white photographs were printed by the author. The half-tones (150 line screen) and line negatives were made by Richard Lovett and the color separations by Derek Mason, both of Owen Innes Lithographic Plate Service, Halifax, N.S. The typesetting (Garamond, Univers) was done by Peggy Keeping and Joan Clayton at McCurdy Printing & Typesetting Limited, Halifax, N.S. The printing (on Cameo Dull Stock) was done by Guy Harrison, assisted by Meredith Bell, on a Heidelberg Kord 64 at the Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Murray Lively prepared the printed forms for shipment. The book was bound by Seaboard Printing, Bedford, N.S.

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